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CRITICAL STUDIES

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CRITICAL STUDIES

CRITICAL STUDIES

BY

QUIDA

Louise de La Ramée

SECOND IMPRESSION

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE
1900

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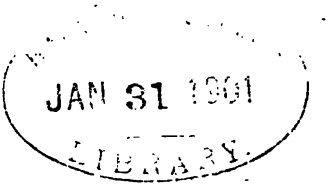

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OUIDA.

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CRITICAL STUDIES

I

GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

Gabriele D'Annunzio

In the world of letters the name of Gabriele d'Annunzio is now famous. There is no cultured society which does not know something at least of the author of the *Innocente* and the *Trionfo*, and is not aware that, in him, one of the ablest and most delicate of living critics believes that he has seen the personification of a renascence of Latin genius. Imprisoned as his novels were in the limits of a language which, however great its beauty, is but little known except in its own land, he has been extraordinarily fortunate in finding such sponsors in the outside world as he has obtained in M. Herelle, in René Doumic, and in the Vicomte de Vogüé. Never has any romance been so admirably heralded as the *Trionfo* in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and never certainly, since lyre was strung or laurels were woven, was any praise ever heard so dulcet and so lavish as that with which he, who has been called

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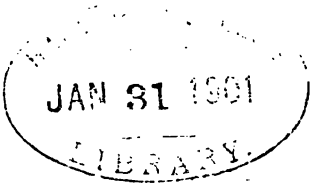

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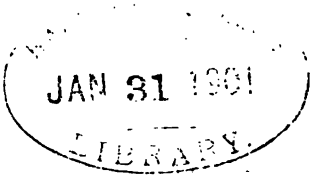

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ing, dribbling, shapeless creature, with its scabby head and cat-like miawling, is much better destroyed, and this is not the sensation which the author desires to arouse; he would wish us to feel at once horror at, and compasssion for, Tullio Hermil, but we can feel nothing except a vague contempt for this helpless young man. Had the semi-murder of it followed immediately on its birth, or had it been found by him after absence a fair two-year-old child, with all the rosebud loveliness of that age, this bathos would have been avoided; and the stealthy sin of its effacement would have carried in it the force of a powerful tragedy undiminished, as it actually is, by gross and comic images, which may be realism but are none the less bathos. It is perfectly natural that Tullio Hermil's abhorrence of this spurious offspring should grow with every day until the desire to destroy it becomes at last an over-mastering impulse; but to make this act tragic, and to awaken that sympathy for the victim which all true tragedy excites, the latter should be so described that the heart of the reader should bleed for it when exposed to the icy air which kills it, and that its martyred infancy should seem fitly lamented by those echoes of the distant *Novena*, which at the supreme moment float through all the silent house.

The *Innocente* has many passages in its pages of perfect beauty like this episode of the *Novena*; its defects are due to its author's incapacity to perceive where the ludicrous damages the pathetic and destroys the terrible. The writer's artistic instinct moved him to create a situation unique, and full of the keenest

interest, abounding in opportunity for the analysis of temptations and emotions; and of such analysis he is a master, if too prolix in his expositions of it. But a want of the perception which warns us off the line of demarcation dividing the dramatic from the grotesque, has allowed him to pass this line, and merge the dramatic in a flood of trivial and commonplace minutiæ. Nor is it natural that, loathing this new-born bastard as Tullio Hermil does, he should accompany his brother to invite an old peasant to be its sponsor. The beauty and simplicity of this passage are great, but they cannot reconcile us to the improbability of such an errand.

Gabriele D'Annunzio

'As we drew near the place where Giovanni de Scordio dwelt, my brother saw in the field the tall figure of the old man.

'"Look! There he is. He is sowing. We bring our invitation in a solemn hour."

'We approached. I trembled within myself as though I were about to commit a profanation. I did indeed profane a thing in itself sacred and beautiful. I went to solicit the spiritual paternity of a venerable life for an adulterous creature.

'"Look at his height," exclaimed Frederigo, pointing to the sower. "He is no taller than other men, and yet he looks a giant."

'We paused under a tree, and watched the labourer from a distance. Giovanni had not perceived us.

'He came straightway towards us up the field with measured slowness. He wore a woollen cap, black and green, with two wings which covered his ears in

the ancient fashion. A white sack hung by a leathern strap from throat to waist, the sack being full of grain. With his left hand he held the sack open, with the right he took the grain and scattered it. His gesture was large, easy, sweeping, moderated to a serene rhythm. The corn, flying from his hand, shone in the sun like gold dust, falling with regularity upon the wet furrows. He advanced slowly, his feet sinking in the moist soil, his head sometimes lifted to the holiness of the light; all his attitude was simple, noble, grand.

. . . . . .

'We entered the glebe.

'"Good health, Giovanni," said Frederigo, going up to the old man. "Be your seed blessed. Be blessed your bread of the future."

'"Good health to you," I repeated.

'The peasant left off work; he uncovered his head.

'"Cover yourself, Giovanni, or we also must stand with bare heads in the sun," said my brother.

'The old man put on his cap, confused, almost shy, smiling.

'He asked humbly, "Why so much honour?"

'I said with a voice which vainly strove to be steady, "I am come to beg you to hold my son at the baptismal font."

'The peasant looked at me astounded, then at my brother. His embarrassment increased. He murmured:

'"Why to me so much honour?"

'"What do you reply?" I asked.

'"I am thy servant; God render the grace for the honour thou dost me to-day, and God be praised for

the joy that He gives to my old age. All the benedictions of Heaven rest on thy son."'

Nothing can be finer, simpler, more effective than this scene, but when we are conscious that the son thus spoken of is the spurious offspring which Tullio Hermil loathes, our sympathies are turned aside by a sense of incongruity and disgust. We are conscious that the young man would never have gone on such an errand, never have consecrated by such expressions the spawn of his wife's incomprehensible and unexplained amour. It is impossible to bring one's self to believe in any part of the story of the *Innocente*, strong as the treatment is in realism of a certain kind, and seductive as is the admirable ease and limpidity of the narrative, which for smoothness of recital, and wonderful semblance of being a true narrative of real events, is not surpassed by any novelist and has been equalled by very few writers indeed.

In all his works D'Annunzio draws women with exquisite veracity and skill; and a rare intuition into the workings of their minds and the beatings of their hearts. Of men he has as yet only drawn one type, whatever they are called, Sperelli, Aurispa, Cantelmi, Hermil, they are always the same person: 'touched to fine issues,' steeped in scholarship, refined, susceptible, voluptuous, but all sick with the *maladie du siècle*; all infirm from the neurasthenia of too early and too unbridled self-indulgence. But his women are infinitely more varied and more intricate. They are wondrous presentments of breathing life. All the contradictions of feminine nature are portrayed with

marvellous exactitude in the vicious, cruel, and frenzied sensualism of Ippolita, of which we watch the gradual growth as we watch Vesuvius on a summer night pass from slumber into fury. With what inimitable dexterity he makes us conscious of the plebeian grossness underlying her physical sorcery, the commonness of her base birth seen here and there through the dazzling sorcery of her attractions; and how natural she is in her buoyant spirits, in her gay sportiveness, in her rapid changes of mood and humour, in her mingling of cruelty and compassion! Equally does he convey to the reader the consciousness of the perfect high breeding in the *Virgine delle Rocce*, of the three sisters of sorrow, so alike yet so dissimilar; three figures stepped down from the canvas of the Veronese, but dimmed by solitude and long neglect. Not less admirably has he given the delicate distinction and infinite sweetness of the Siennese, Maria Ferrès (although she is indeed an almost exact reproduction of Giuliana Hermil), whilst that patrician courtesan Donna Elena Muti, shameless, lascivious, and conscienceless, is nevertheless always a high-bred woman. He has incarnated the incomparable charm of the Italian woman, the most graceful, the most impassioned, the most seductive woman on earth, although also perhaps the most imperious, pitiless, and fiercely exacting in her passions. Even Ippolita, vicious as she is, is 'l'adorable Ippolita,' as De Vogüé calls her, and her portrait is surely one which will become as precious to future generations as that of Manon Lescaut is to us.

I much fear that the only work of his which will become known to the English public in general will

be the *Virgine delle Rocce*, because (as far as it has gone) it is not indecent. The other works could not be reproduced in English; and the *Virgine delle Rocce* unhappily gives no just measure of the talent and strength of the writer. At present it is but the first of a triune romance of which the two latter parts are as yet unpublished. It is the cleanest, the simplest, and the most romantic of his works, but it will probably be caviare to the crowd, and it wholly lacks the great qualities of its predecessors. It is not well-constructed like the *Innocente*, it is not daring and intense like the *Trionfo*; it is not brilliant like *Il Piacere*; it is rambling, and vague, and shadowy, and it is difficult to collect the threads of the narrative. It is published in a fragment, which is always an unwise method of publication, but it is to be feared that when entire it will never equal the *Innocente* or the *Trionfo*. Indeed when severed from the theme of sensual psychology D'Annunzio loses in strength and in colour; he becomes desultory, almost indifferent; and wanders through his own garden of romance with little interest in it, much as in this latest story his own Oddo and Antonello stray through the ruins of Linturno and drift through the water-lilies of the lonely stream.

But this story, defective though it be, has a great charm for those conversant with certain phases of Italian life. I have known just such a grand old palace in the solitude of a deserted country, just such young daughters growing up in stately poverty and perpetual joylessness; just such paternal obsession in clinging to ruined thrones and perished faiths; just such an interminable sequence of colourless, unin-

terested, imprisoned days where the life is the life of the Lady of Shalott, and no eyes are lifted to see that the almond-trees are in flower.

Every page of this short book, which Frederic Leighton would have delighted to illustrate, is impressed with Italian verity of a kind which few foreigners have ever occasion to verify. The vast stone stairs of the approach, the huge dim archways, the great fountains where the stone Tritons spout and the ghosts rise with the spray in the moonlight of midnight, the dry fish-ponds full of odorous plants self sown, the neglected, wild, beautiful, fragrant gardens, the immense halls and chambers frescoed, water-gilt, marble-encrusted; the silent corridors, the ceilings lofty as the cupolas of cathedrals, the fading tapestries, the soft grey dust, the abandonment, the poverty, the stateliness, the infinite pathos and charm of this splendour, 'which dies so slowly because born of true art and of what was once an heroic nobility.' All these are portrayed with perfect fidelity in this strange and too slight story of the three daughters of the fallen House of Montega, and no less true to the facts of Italian life is the destiny which weighs upon them, the insanity which dwells amongst them in the person of their mother, whom we see living before us as she passes, carried in her perfumed and painted sedan chair, with her strange fixed regard, her tiara of ebon hair, her pallid face, her jewelled hands. Madness is a frequent malady in Italy, and few noble families are without some insane member. The afflicted person is usually kept in his or her apartments in the palace, or in one of the villas

of the family, and is courteously inquired for by all visitors as Claudio in this story asks after the health of Donna Aldoina. Italians are usually kind to their insane relatives and not at all ashamed of them, but *il pazzo* or *la pazza* lends a weird fantastic gloom to the ancient and stately houses which saw their birth, and shelter their infirmity, and will hold their coffins in their crypts.

Possibly there seems more to me in this story than there actually is, because I know so well the tenor of the life therein depicted; and the absence of all objective interest, of all care for nature and for art, of all perception of the consolations to be found in both, which render that life so much more barren than it need be.

D'Annunzio has typified such barrenness of thought, such narrowness of horizon, in the family which dwells in the grand old villa of Tregento, and many a time he must, no doubt, with his own mind filled by classic memories, and knowledge of the arts, and touched to impassioned appreciation of all natural beauty, have suffered acutely from the apathy, ignorance, and unconscious self-absorption of such a domestic atmosphere. He has no doubt constantly been met with the incapacity to understand, the wonder of ignorance, the blank dulness of unopened minds, such as he suggests in the following passage:—

'We were near Rebursa. The rocky chain, with its sharp and broken peaks turned to the right following the winding Saurgo, rising tier on tier towards the massive summit of Mount Caran. On the left of

the road, the soil was smooth and undulating like the large dunes of a seashore, becoming further off a succession of hills, tawny and humped like camels of the desert.

'"Look, look!" I cried, seeing another silver cloud of blossom. "Can you not see it, Antonello?"

'He did not look at the almond trees with my eyes; he looked, but with a faint smile, wondering probably at the childlike joy awakened in me at the sight of the first flowers. Yet, what fairer spectacle could this rude and stony country offer to us?

'"If my sisters only were here!" cried Oddo, to whom my pleasure communicated itself. "Oh, if they were here!"

'His voice was full of regret.

'"They need to be brought where flowers bloom," said Antonello, softly.

'"Look, look!" I cried again, giving myself up to my delight with fuller ease, now that I saw some reflection of it at least awakened in these poor shut souls. "I am glad these flowers are mine, Oddo."

'"My sisters must come to them," sighed Antonello, like one who speaks in a dream of sleep.

'It seemed as if his feverish eyes refreshed themselves with that vision of things so pure . . .

'They both looked at me, somewhat confused, faintly smiling, as if they had been brought unexpectedly before some extraordinary sight which stupefied them, yet filled them with delicious sensations. They had shown me their malady, had revealed to me their suffering, had spoken to me of that melancholy prison whence they had come and whither

they would return; and I, on the common highway open to all, had invited them to recognise and celebrate the spring—the spring which they had both forgotten, which they seemed to see now for the first time after many years, which they gazed at with a mingling of fear and joy as at a miracle.'

Is not this delicate in expression as the sprays of the almond blossoms themselves?

An Italian scholar, in writing to me to-day, does indeed say with considerable accuracy that the affectation in the style of D'Annunzio takes from it its freedom and sincerity, that when he is writing of almond boughs and nightingales he does not give us the impression that these things are dear to him, but rather that he is endeavouring to say the most beautiful things he can think of about them. 'His style,' says my Italian correspondent, 'is the one occupation of his life, the one absorbing interest of his work; he cares but little for nature or for human nature, except as these are strings to his lyre.' This is in a great measure a correct, if a too severe, censure. There is in him nothing of that genuine emotion which wells up in the heart of Pierre Loti as he writes; D'Annunzio is always outside that which he describes; there is in him much of the virtuoso; he reminds me of a friend of mine, a London celebrity, who once invited a party of artists to see a fine work of art in his London house. When the curtain was drawn aside, the work of art was found to be a young nude woman, of singularly beautiful proportions, extended on a rug of black bear-skins to set off the ambers and ivories

and blue-vein traceries of her skin. D'Annunzio stretches his subject thus bare before him in a well-adjusted light, and calls the world to see: for the subject he has no compassion. This *preciosità* (Anglicè, affectation) is still more apparent in his prefaces than in his works which they precede. These prefaces are long, elaborate, ornate disquisitions, with much of the euphuism of pedantic scholarship; and when in the preface to the *Trionfo* the author claims that this licentious romance is intended to hasten and welcome the coming of the Uebermensch, it is impossible not to smile at such a pretension, and, as even De Vogüé admits, at this point we are driven to sigh for the return of the *mandolinata*. He confirms the justice of a charge of *preciosità* himself in his introduction to *Il Piacere*, in which he speaks of 'the long and grave fatigue, the disgust which follows the painful and capricious artifices of style.' This is not the language of a true artist, for in the beauties and intricacies of style which should all have one aim—simplicity—the writer who is a true artist finds the same intimate satisfaction as the musician, the painter, the sculptor, each finds in the pursuit of his art. In style is the *sfogo* of the writer's procreative passion. It should bring with it neither fatigue nor disgust, but the serene joys of a satisfied desire.

However, apart from this fault of *preciosità*, which De Vogüé does not appear to have perceived, but which seems to many Italians incontestable, the style of D'Annunzio is very fine; finest of all when it is spent on the portraiture of natural scenes, and of characters unhampered by conventionality. Read this

brief episode of the simplest kind; how alive with actuality it is! It is taken from the earlier part of the residence of Aurispa and Ippolita at the Hermitage.

Gabriele D'Annunzio

'Hearing a rattle of plates, he asked, "Are you hungry?" And the question suggested by the little homely sound, put eagerly, with childlike insistence, made Ippolita smile.

'"Yes, a little," she answered, smiling; and both of them looked at the table ready spread under the oak tree. In a few minutes more their dinner was ready.

'"You must be content with what there is," said Giorgio. "It is very humble fare."

'"Oh, I should be satisfied with herbs."

'And with a gay air she drew near the table, examined curiously the tablecloth, the silver, the glass, the plates, finding everything charming, delighted like a child with the blue flowers which ornamented the fine white pottery.

'"Everything delights me here!"

'She bent over the big, round loaf, which was still warm under its golden and crisp crust.

'"Ah! what a good smell it has!" And, as if impelled by her childlike joy in the fresh bread, she broke off a piece of its crust.

'"What good bread!"

'Her strong, white teeth shone as they bit and closed, and all the movements of her curving lip expressed the pleasure which she felt; and from her whole person there seemed to emanate a rare, fresh grace, which attracted and amazed her lover with a new and unexpected charm.

'"Oh, how good! Taste, how good it is!"'

What can be more graphic, more simple, more radiant, than this picture painted in words so few?

Take this landscape, so true to the scenery of the Veneto:—

'It was afternoon. He explored the winding paths which went, now up, now down, leading towards the point of the Penna, on the seashore. He looked before him and around him with curiosity, but, perhaps, with some forced attention, as if he wished to understand obscure meanings hidden in these simple scenes, to wrest from them some unseizable secret. Rising in the heart of these hills of the coast the water of a brook, directed by a homely aqueduct made of hollowed trees, crossed the low-lying land between the two slopes. Other little rivulets were caught and guided by concave tiles to water the tilled earth grown with rich vegetation, and above these streams, ever bright and rippling, there leaned some beautiful purple flowers;[1] all these humble things seemed to him pregnant with profound life. All the merry waters ran down along the incline towards the pebbly beach, and passed under a little bridge. In the shadow of its arch some women were washing linen, and their gestures were mirrored in the stream. On the shingle other linen was already outspread, whitening in the sun. Along the path a man walked with bare feet,

[1] Campanulas, spotted orchis, or foxglove, I suppose. It is characteristic of him that he sighs for an 'unseizable secret,' and does not take the trouble to learn the names of the flowers he sees.

carrying his shoes swinging in his hand. Two children, laden with linen, ran along laughing and playing. An old woman hung up on a line a blue mattress.

'On the edge of the path there were little white shells, out of them frail tentacles trembled and stretched to the light. From a rock above hung twisted dead roots like entwined snakes. Farther on there was a large peasant's house, bearing on the summit of its roof a floral ornament in clay. An outside staircase led up to a covered terrace. Two women sat spinning at the head of the stair, and the flax shone in the sun like gold. You could hear the wheels turn. By a window sat another, weaving; you could see her rhythmical gestures in moving the shuttle. In the courtyard a huge grey ox was lying down; he shook his ears and moved his tail faintly but incessantly in war against the flies. The cocks and hens cackled and crowed around him. Farther on still another little river crossed the road; it laughed aloud, crisp, mirthful, vivid, limpid.

'Near another farmhouse a thick bay hedge shut in an orchard. The straight, shining stems rose immovable, crowned with their glistening foliage. One of the bay trees was enveloped in the embrace of a clematis, which lovingly conquered the martial bay with her blossoms of snow, the veil of her nuptial freshness. Underneath, the earth was dewy and fragrant. In an angle a black cross leaned over the hedge, the silence had the resigned sadness of a graveyard. At the end of a line there arose a flight of steps, half in shade, half in sunshine; they led to a door standing half open, protected by two branches of olive

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hung from its rustic architrave. On the lowest step sat an old man asleep, his head uncovered, his chin on his breast, his hands on his knees; the light touched his aged brow. From the half-open door there came, to soothe his senile sleep, the cadence of a rocking cradle, the rise and fall of a murmured lullaby.'

What can be more true or more beautiful than this? Mark the contrast of the old man sleeping on the stone steps, with the young mother, unseen within, singing *sotto voce* her cradle song. In totally different style and tone take these few lines on Orvieto :—

'A rock of tufa hanging above a melancholy valley; a city so silent that it seems empty: the windows are closed, in the grey lanes grass grows; a capuchin crosses a square; a bishop descends from a closed carriage before the gate of a hospital; a tower rises in a white and rainy sky; a clock strikes the hour slowly; all at once at the end of the street a miracle in stone—the Cathedral.'

Is not the city of Luca Signorelli set before you with those few lines? There is here something far beyond dexterity or ingenuity of style; there is the poet's, the painter's, power to embrace a world at a glance, and with a touch set before duller eyes that world in all its varieties and suggestions, all its past and its present, all its secrets of the grave and of the future.

Take again this very different picture :—

'He found the gorse.

'On a tableland the thickly-growing gorse had flowered so densely as to spread a vast golden mantle over all the soil. Five maidens were gathering the flowers and filling with them skips and baskets, singing as they worked. They sang a song of thirds and fives in perfect harmony. When one of them reached a special phrase she lifted her whole bust out of the yellow maze of blossom that the notes might go forth from her throat with fuller liberty, and held it long sustained in air, looking her companions in the eyes whilst they applauded with their hands of flowers.

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'When they saw the stranger they stopped and bent again over the gorse. Stifled saucy laughter rippled under the yellow sea. Giorgio asked,—

'"Which of you is Favetta?"

'A girl, brown as an olive, raised her head in reply, amazed, almost terrified: "It is I, sir."

'"Are you not the finest singer of San Vito?"

'"No, sir. That is not true."

'"It is true. It is true!" cried her companions.

'"Sir! make her sing."

'"No, sir, it is not true. I cannot sing."

'She hid herself, laughing, her face all aflame; she twisted her apron whilst the others teased her. She was of short stature but well-formed; her bosom was high and large, swollen with songs. She had curly hair, dark eyebrows, aquiline profile; something in her carriage wild and free. After the first resistance she yielded.

'The others, taking her by the arms, held her in their circle. They were up to their waists in the flowering gorse, whilst round them the bees were humming.

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'Favetta began unsteadily, but with each note her voice grew firmer. It was limpid, liquid, crystal, clear as a water spring. She sang a couplet and the others sang in chorus a ritornello. They prolonged the harmonies, putting their mouths close to form one single vocal flute; the song rose and fell in the light air with the slow regularity of a litany.

'Favetta sang:—

'"All the springs are dry,
O poor love of mine!
He dies of thirst.
Where is the water thou broughtest me?
We have brought thee an earthen jar,
But round it is a chain of gold!"

'The others sang:—

'"Long live Love!"

'It was the salutation of May to Passion, pouring from young breasts, which perchance as yet knew not its sweetness and perchance never would know its sorrow.'

Or take the following passage which is as essentially true in its accurate observation as it is beautiful in its expression. Tullio Hermil and Giuliana are listening at Villa Lilla to the first songster of that spring.

'The nightingale sang. At first it was like a burst of melodious glee; a jet of easy trills which fell through the air like pearls falling on the glass of a

harmonium. Then came a pause. A shake arose, agile, marvellously prolonged, like a proof of strength, in an impulse of insolence, a challenge to some unknown rivals. *Gabriele D'Annunzio*

'A second pause. A phrase of three notes with a tone of interrogation passed on a chain of light variations repeating the interrogative phrase five or six times, modulated softly like a slender reed flute on which is played a pastoral. A third pause: the song becomes elegiac, turns to a minor key, tender as a sigh; it is almost a groan; it expresses all the grief of the lonely lover, a heartrending desire; a vain hope; it flings out a last appeal, improvised, acute as a scream of anguish: then it ceases. A longer pause, more ominous. Then one hears a new accent which scarcely seems to come from the same throat so humble is it, so timid, so slight; it resembles the twitter of scarce-fledged birds, the chirrup of sparrows; then, with a miraculous volubility, this noisy note changes into a breathless song, more and more rapid in its trills, vibrating in sustained shakes, turning in daring flights of sound, leaping, growing, bounding, attaining the highest heights of the soprano. The songster is drunk with his own song. With pause so brief that one note scarce ceases ere another succeeds it, he spends his delirium in ever-varied melody, impassioned and sweet, subdued and ear-piercing, light and grave, now interrupted by broken sighs, by lament and supplication, now by impetuous lyrical improvisation and supreme appeal. It seems that even the gardens are listening, that the sky stoops over the old tree from whose summit this poet, invisible

to mortal eyes, pours out such floods of eloquence. The flowers breathe deeply and silently. A yellow glow lingers in the west. This last lingering glance of the dying day is sad. But a single star has risen, alone and tremulous like a drop of luminous dew.'

He who can write thus is a great writer; and the charm of this passage is not alone its poetry but its exact truth. The song of the nightingale varies much in accord with age, with species (for there are two species, Luscinia Philomela, and Luscinia Major), with climate, with the sense of security, and the want of security, but the song of a nightingale in its maturity, who is unalarmed and feels at home in the gardens of his choice, is precisely such a song as is described in this passage, and is more completely echoed in it than in the Pastoral Symphony of Beethoven. This sympathy with the melody of birds is the more singular in D'Annunzio, because Italians are almost invariably indifferent to such melody, and snare the divine songster in the net, or shoot him whilst he shouts his nuptial *Io Triumphe!* with the most stolid indifference. And it may, perhaps, be that D'Annunzio does not care for the bird himself more than the rest of his countrymen, but only cares for his own eloquence concerning it. It may be said, without risk of injustice to him, that great tenderness is at no moment found in him. He has not 'the pathetic fallacy'; but he approaches it very nearly at times. When women shall have lost for him some of the intensity of their physical charm, nature in her wider and more profound meanings will,

perhaps, become more visible and more dear to him. Perhaps, however, it will not, for the Italian is rarely impersonal. *Gabriele D'Annunzio*

Something of the affectation to which the delicate taste of my Italian correspondent justly objects must be admitted to mar, by its artificiality, the many magnificent pages dedicated by him to the sea. Magnificent they are, true also, entirely true; but some mannerism there is in them, some over-intricate embroidery of phrase. The sea he knows best, and remembers always, is the Adriatic, of which the extreme beauty of the colour, like the leaves of the silverweed, as wind and sun pass over the meadows, has always before him been too little noted except, I may venture to say, by myself.

'O, fair, clear seas of September!' he cries in the *Piacere*. 'The water is calm and innocent as a sleeping child, and lies outstretched under a pearl-like sky. Sometimes it is all green of the brilliant and intense green of malachite, and on it the small rosy sails seem like wandering fires. Sometimes it is all azure, of an intense blue, like the ultramarine which heralds use for blazonries, veined with gold like lapis-lazuli, and on it the painted sails seem like a procession of standards, of banners, of spears borne on a Catholic holy day. And yet again at other moments it takes on a metallic gleam, a silvery paleness, the hues of a ripening lemon, something indefinable and strange, and on this mystical surface the boats then glide and fade, and are seen no more as the illumined wings of cherubim sink into the faint fundamental hues of an old Giottesque fresco.

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'The sea was not alone for him a delight for the eyes, but it was a perennial wave in which he steeped his thirsting thoughts; a magical fountain of youth in which his body recovered health and his mind nobility. The sea had for him the mysterious attraction of a native country, and he abandoned himself to it with filial confidence, as a weak child in the arms of an omnipotent father; and he derived consolation from it, for no one had ever confided his sorrows, his desires, or his dreams to the ear of the sea in vain.'

So, we are told by D'Annunzio, thinks Andrea Sperelli, and so thought also Giorgio Aurispa. But the sea has no permanent power on the soul of either; the one returns from his contemplations of it to his life of voluptuous pleasure, and the other drowns both himself and the woman, whom he has adored to frenzy, in its waves, whilst the dog mourns 'forsaken beneath the olive trees, and the waters murmur softly, rocking as in a cradle the reflections of the stars.'

Only once in D'Annunzio's work does genuine and yearning regret, of which it is impossible to doubt the spontaneity and sincerity, thrill through him, and move him to intense emotion and unstudied eloquence. It is when, in the person of Claudio Cantelmo, he speaks in furious invective of the modern desecration of Rome; in these passages he is strong without effort, eloquent without study, and veracious alike in sorrow and in scorn. His invective is poured from his heart's depths, and thrills with the force of the Latin orators of the ruined Forum.

'I have lived several years in Rome; in that third Rome which should have represented "Love reigning by Latin blood on Latin soil," and have seen radiant on its heights the wondrous lights of a new Ideal. I have been witness to its most ignominious evolutions, to the most obscene unions that have ever desecrated a sacred place. And I have understood the symbolism hidden in that act of an Asiatic conqueror, who cast myriads of human heads in the fountains of Samarcand, when he desired to create a capital. The wise and cruel tyrant meant to signify the necessity of merciless destruction in the creation of a new order of things.

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. . . . . .

'The ship which bore the Thousand of Marsala only set sail that the art of exchange and barter should be protected and covered by the State!

. . . . . .

'It was the epoch of the most frenzied fury of the destroyers and contractors on the site of Rome. With the storms of dust there were propagated a sort of lunacy of gain, a malignant delirium, seizing not only on the tradesman and money-lenders, and the workers in brick and mortar, but also on the elect heirs of the papal *majorat*, who primarily had looked with scorn and disgust on the newcomers from the windows of their palaces of travertine, indestructible under the encrustations of ages.

'The magnificent patrician races founded there, renewed and strengthened by nepotism, and the strife of opposing houses, descended and abased themselves one by one, slid down into the new mud, sank, and

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vanished. The illustrious riches, amassed through centuries of gorgeous pillage and Mæcenic luxury, were thrown into the whirlpool of the speculations of the Bourse.

'And around them, on these patrician lawns, where, only the previous spring, the violets had blossomed more numberless than the blades of grass, there were now mounds of lime, heaps of bricks, the wheels of stone-laden carts creaked on the turf, on the air were the oaths of the drivers, the shouts of the overseers, while every hour hastened on the brutal work which was to efface and occupy the sacred soil once dedicated to Beauty and to Dreams. There passed over Rome a blighting blizzard of barbarism, menacing all that greatness and loveliness which were without equals in the memory of the world. Even the laurels and the rose trees of the Villa Schiarra, for so many nights of so many summers hymned by their nightingales, fell destroyed, or remained in their desecration behind the gates of little gardens parcelled out to the little cockney boxes of tradesmen. The gigantic Ludovisian cypresses, those of the Aurora, those which spread the clouds of their solemn and mystic antiquity above the Olympian brows of Goethe, were now laid prone in line one after another, with all their dishonoured roots stretching towards the pallid sky, the black dishonoured roots which still seemed to hold in their immense network the web of a life greater than our own.

'Even over the box alleys of the Villa Albani, which had seemed as immortal as their Caryatides and their Hermes, there hung that shadow of a vandal's ruin.

The contagion of destruction spread everywhere. *Gabriele*
In the ceaseless combat of gain, in the savage fury *D'Annunzio*
of avaricious greed and passions, in the disordered haste of commercial activity, every sense of common decency was forgotten, all respect for the past was trampled under foot. The struggle for gain was carried on with blind fury, with neither check nor curb. The pickaxe, the shovel, and the cunning of fraud were the weapons employed. And week after week, with incredible velocity, there arose on the violated earth the huge foolish cages of brick and mortar, pierced with square holes, surmounted with sham cornices, encrusted with shameful stucco ornaments. A kind of immense white tumour rose and spread on the wounded and bleeding side of the great Urbs and drained away its life.

'And then, day after day, at sunset, along the princely avenues of the Borghese Park, we could see in gorgeous bran-new equipages the new elect of Fortune, from whom not barber, nor tailor, nor boot-maker, had power to take away the ignoble stamp. We could see them pass and repass with the sonorous trot of their shining bay and brown horses; they were recognisable at a glance by the insolence of their pose and the awkward carriage of their rapacious and vulgar hands; and they seemed to cry aloud,—

'"We are the new rulers of Rome. Bow down to us!"

'In truth such are its rulers; such the present masters of that Rome which prophets and poets once likened to the bow of Ulysses.'

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Often have I myself written similar things, but in me they have been considered exaggerations. They cannot be so considered in Gabriele D'Annunzio of Francavilla.

All who love Rome and loathe her modern violation must thank him from their hearts for such passages, and must mourn with him that we cannot drive out the spoilers from our desecrated temples.

This is, indeed, his greatest strength, that, whilst still a young man, he yet has the courage to resist the intellectual tendencies of his contemporaries, to refuse to worship their gods, to see and despise the falseness of those scientific pretensions which enslave the multitude in modern life. His intellect, richly stored by learning, is, in a large measure, free of prejudice. This is a great and rare distinction in a generation which more completely than any which has preceded it, is the timid slave of formula and the credulous servant of professional bigotry.

He has kept a complete mental liberty; free from the superstitions of religion, which, in this day, it is easy to be; but also free from the superstitions of science, which is far harder, and incurs far greater obloquy and opposition.

In his study on Giorgione, he says what it needs much courage to say in these days:—

'The scientific spirit has invaded the generation of the second half of our century. Struck by the surprising results of physics and calculation, men were inclined to believe for a time, that by the aid of the one or the other, they would be able to penetrate into

all mysteries and solve all problems. But to this proud exaltation has now succeeded a discouragement mingled with suspicion. They say to themselves, and not without reason: "Where is this certainty that science promised us?" If ever certainty were incomplete, deprived of solid criterion, it is that offered by natural science. As for the sciences called exact, some, like geometry, repose on a tottering base of arbitrary affirmations; others, like algebra, on mere methods of reasoning, and contain as much or as little certainty as the formula of a syllogism.'

This is emphatically true; but it is a fact which is by no means recognised by all, and which is still violently denied by those fanatics whose form of bigotry is either experimental or exact science.

The mind of D'Annunzio refuses all bondage. It is a law to itself, as the mind of the great writer should be. I imagine that the opinion of him held by others, is to him of the most absolute unimportance. His teaching is always to preserve the independence of the Ego, to live without attention to formula or usage, to be, both materially and spiritually, that which we were created to be by nature.

His morality is of the most primitive kind; or rather, he has none whatever, no more than has a South-Sea islander lying in the sun under a cocoa-nut tree whilst the surf bathes his naked limbs. It would be absurd to accuse him of immorality because the indulgence of the senses is as natural and as legitimate in his estimation, as Favetta's song amongst the golden furze, or the reapers' welcome of

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the purple wine. Yet by a not rare anomaly, this demand for perfect freedom of the passions is accompanied by a tendency to desire tyranny in political matters. He is disposed to deify force. In one or two expressions there is an echo of Carlyle which sounds oddly and jarringly amongst the amorous liberties and artistic debaucheries of the rest; and is not worthy of a writer who has so much courage in opposing scientific pharisaism and the thraldom of the schools. He is disposed to admire what is strong simply because it is strong, forgetful that such strength is sustained and nourished by the suffering of the weak. It is true that he has lived in an atmosphere in which the verities embodied in the aspirations, abortive but always noble, of the higher efforts of revolution have been received with fear and misunderstanding. The tendencies and training of the *Codini* are visible through the eloquence of the poet and the conclusions of the philosopher. The entire lack in him of all altruism comes from this. Mazzini must be as unintelligible to him as Tolstoi. The mass of humanity is always to him the filthy, surging, bestial multitudes of the crowd at Casalbordino. But even this absence of benevolence is better than the pitiful sycophancy of writers who are as fulsome in their flattery to Demos as to kings; is manlier than the nauseating self-worship of a Humanity at once its own pimp and pander, its own adorer and assassin.

In his scorn of the human flocks of sheep, he forgets, I admit, too entirely the justice to which the humblest unit amongst these flocks has right, but that scorn, even when misdirected, is fresh and bracing as the

dash of his own Adriatic waves, when the east wind drives them hurrying on to the shingle beach. He has no fear; and he never stoops to that base flattery of his own species which is the most nauseous feature of modern politics and of modern science.

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'This alone is your office,' he cries to his contemporaries, if they would resist the debasing influences of their time, 'defend the dream which is in you. Since in this day mortals no longer bring tribute of love and honour to the choristers of the Muses, defend yourselves, O poets, with all your weapons, steep the point of your rapiers in the most biting poisons. Let your satires bear such corrosive acid in them that they shall pierce to the very pith of the spine and destroy it. Brand to the very bone the stupid forehead of those fools who would mark every soul with the same label, and make every brain like another, as the heads of nails are beaten into a common likeness by the blows of the nailmaker. Let your mordant laughter reach to heaven when you hear the stablemen of the Great Beast shouting in the parliaments of the earth. . . . Defend the thought which they menace, defend the beauty which they outrage, defend the antique freedom of your masters and the future freedom of your disciples, against the insane assaults of drunken slaves. Despair not, though you be few in number. You have the supreme force of the world: the written word.'

The written word is indeed in his hand a scourge, a sword, a sheaf of arrows from the quiver of the divine Python Slayer.

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And in no country more than in the Italy of his generation is such a scourge, such a sword, such flame-tipped arrows, needed to slay the courtiers, the usurers, the sycophants, the knaves, the brutes, the sellers of justice who fasten like leeches on her body.

This son of Italy is a great writer; a great poet. Read his works in the original text all ye who can, men and women for whom life has no secrets and truth has no terror.

He is young; the time will come, as it comes to all, when the joys of the senses will fade for him as the roses of the summer are scattered by autumn winds.

Let us hope that there will be later a second period of his creative art, in which there will be developed an original genius free of exotic influences, and untrammelled by the search for idioms and pruriencies. Genius, like the river at its source, takes the colour of the earth it springs from. It is only when it has reached its full volume, its deepest currents, that it becomes clear and reflects the sky alone.

Let us hope that such a future awaits him, and that more and more fully will he realise what he has already said in noble words:—

'Art! Here is the one faithful passion ever youthful, nay, immortal; here is the fountain of pure joy unknown to the multitude; here is the divine food which makes men like to gods. How could he have stooped to drink at other cups when he had once tasted of this?[1] How could he have bent to taste of other joys, once having known this ecstasy?

[1] He is writing of Andrea Sperelli in *Il Piacere*.

How could his senses have let themselves be weakened and debased to lowest lusts when they had once been stirred to that highest sensibility which beholds the invisible, which touches the impalpable, which divines the most hidden secrets in the heart of nature?'

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With these words, which are the greatest in meaning that he has hitherto written, I will, for the present moment, take my leave of him.

II

GEORGES DARIEN

Georges Darien

Of all countries, France remains the land in which it is possible to tell the most truth. The nation of Montaigne and Molière is always the first to recognise and award the title of talent to lay bare the shoulders of her community and use the scourge upon them. If at its first appearance the strange and terrible revelations contained in the work entitled *Biribi* were met by official obstruction and attempted suppression, the book has conquered them, and has been allowed to carry the light of its torches into the dark places of military administration and oppression. In Italy, as in Germany and Austria, it would have been stopped by fine, exile, and seizure. In Russia it could never have been issued at all. In England it would have been as costly to the author as were his issues of Zola to the unhappy and martyrised Vizetelly. In France alone its pictures of the most terrible facts pass unarrested, by right of that literary liberty which the *esprit gaulois* has always awarded, however much government and law may have been alarmed.

It has been said that the accusations contained in

the works of Georges Darien are a *flétrissure à la France*, and as such should never have been made public by a patriotic writer and a ci-devant soldier. But here we merely meet again the hackneyed question whether the writer of talent is bound by patriotism or any other scruple to withhold truth, or whether he is not rather bound to disclose the truth as he believes it to be at all costs, whether to himself or to others. It is not necessary for me to say with which of these opinions I agree. The little which has been done towards any true progress of the human mind has been done by the expression of free thought, and by its fearless exposure of evils protected by the crystallisation of time, usage, and prejudice. Over the modern world which chatters of liberty, but does not anywhere possess it, or even know actually what it means, there hang, in heavy and icy weight, two ever-increasing despotisms: the scientific and the military. Of the former it is not necessary to treat in these pages; of the latter the yearly increase throughout Europe, ever since the war of 1870-71, must alarm every unbiassed thinker, bringing with it, as it does, the impoverishment of the people, the curse of youth and manhood, the endless strain of a fiscal burden, so enormous that every class groans under it, and the perpetual and diseased anxiety in which every nation lives, suspecting its neighbours, and turn by turn affronting them insolently and cringing to them obsequiously, according as it is made to feel the power of its own strength or the weakness of its own inferiority. Every syllable printed which tends to show the reality of military tyranny at this moment is

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valuable, and should be welcomed, however odious it may be to military authority and government; and especially valuable when it comes from one who has passed through the scenes which he depicts, and draws, not from imagination, but from memory.

Georges Darien has been the man whom he describes; treated as the worst of criminals, though wholly guiltless of breaking any criminal law. Georges Darien in using the first person, both in *Biribi* and in *Bas les Cœurs*, is but writing portions of his own autobiography; he was a boy of ten, like his young hero in the latter book, and a volunteer like the gunner of the second class in the 41st battery of artillery in the former work, and to this fact there are owing that directness, simplicity, and virility which are the distinguishing characteristics of both these volumes. They are alive with life. The reader may resent them, detest them, dread them and their revelations; but he must be impressed by them; he must receive from their perusal that thrill which can only come from reality. They are saturated with the tears of blood of a strong man who feels his own impotency to rouse his generation and to change humanity; who knows that his voice is the voice of the prophet crying in the wilderness, and echoing over a desert of dead bones and drifting sand. There are few greater pangs than to see the truth and know it, and feel that the salvation of others lies in it, and to tell it in vain to deaf ears, and offer its water of life to lips closed by pride and cruelty and folly.

The name *Biribi* sounds too light for such a subject; it sounds like a joke; but the joke is grim indeed,

grim as the dance of skeletons round a gallows-tree. *Georges Darien*
In actual fact *Biribi* is the nickname given by French and native soldiers in Algeria to the punishment-battalions of the Franco-African army; a slangy *petit nom* given in jest to one of the most awful hells that earth holds. The tortures which are suffered in every army, in the best army, and in the time of greatest peace, can scarcely ever be over-rated; and they are not the less, but the more terrible, because almost always endured in silence and ignored by authority. Now and then a voice is raised from the ranks, occasionally, very rarely, some punishment, or injustice, more brutal than usual, comes to light, and rouses public indignation. *Biribi* is one of those rare utterances rising from the sealed pits, in which uncared-for and unpitied lives are beaten into senseless pulp of bruised and bleeding flesh.

There is great originality in the literary talent of Georges Darien. His style is all his own. His manner of relation resembles no other. He has nothing of the modern school, except its hopelessness; he is strong, intense, virile, rough; he seeks no ornament, he strives for no effect; he writes as he feels, boldly, passionately, with that eloquence which is the offspring of simplicity and of veracity, and that potency which comes from wide knowledge of literatures and of mankind. Belonging by birth to the *bourgeoisie*, son of a Catholic father and a Calvinist mother, his early years were embittered by religious strife. He has later on travelled much; he has known the lowest classes and the hardest ways of life; he is still young in years, but old in the most varied experiences; and

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he has, certainly, uncommon powers, which have as yet not been duly recognised, for he offends the prejudices and vested interests of his generation, and even in France prejudice and vested interests are strong and close many channels.

He disdains, moreover, to appeal to that large class of readers who require a book, cast in the form of a story, to possess a story. Like the famous knife-grinder he has none to tell, if by story we understand, as most people do, a love-tale in some one of its forms. *Biribi* is the stern and terrible narrative of the career of an *insoumis; Bas les Cœurs* is the simple, domestic record of a boy's recollections of the *Année Terrible.* In neither is there any hint or fragment of romance. This fact at once limits his public to the restricted number who appreciate the skill which can afford to dispense with the elements of romance, and to rely solely on its own power of description and analysis of character. In this respect for literary excellence and harmonious treatment I should place *Bas les Cœurs* before *Biribi.* The relation of events at Versailles, before and after the Prussian occupation, as seen from the point of view of a family of the town, is told with such perfect naturalness that the reader follows it with the deepest interest, and remains fascinated by the admirable manner in which the most tragic and momentous events of history are reflected in the mind of a boy of ten years old.

The tranquillity and precision of his use of the etching-needle, with which he describes the daily life and street scenes in Versailles, contrasts curiously with the hot colour and broad charcoal marks with which

he portrays the tortures of the punishment-battalions in Africa. *Georges Darien*

This testifies to the flexibility of Darien's talent, since nothing can be more different to the impetuous and turgid violence of *Biribi* than the restrained and delicate irony of *Bas les Cœurs:* the one is a battle-piece of Vereschagin, crowded with begrimed and panting figures, in which the dumb canvas seems to shriek with war and smoke with blood; the other is a cabinet picture of Meissonier's, finished, polished, small in measurement, illimitable in suggestion, fine as the point of a needle, cruel as the fork of a snake's tongue. For, undoubtedly, Darien is cruel; but he is cruel from the impotent rage which is in him, the powerless sorrow and scorn which his country, his generation, his fellow mortals, his vision of things as they are, awaken in his memory and in his desires.

The apathy and sheepishness of the general multitude fill him with wrath; he longs to pull down on the world its temple, like Samson, regardless of the fall of the column and the roof on himself. No one who loves received doctrines, crystallised commonplaces, undisputed formulæ, should open these books. Such persons will only see in them blasphemies against their honoured gods; for this author is not suited to the smug self-complacency of Philistinism, 'sanding its sugar and praising its Lord.'

To represent war as it is done in the terrible pages of *La Dèbâcle*, or in the heartrending sketch of the *Attaque du Moulin*, is not difficult to the novelist who has power and knowledge. To represent the effects of war on entirely uninteresting and commonplace

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persons, and yet keep the attention of the reader riveted to what is passing in one ordinary household during a frightful national calamity, is a far more difficult feat; especially when all the sympathies of the reader which would be easily roused by noble sentiments in the sufferers are voluntarily alienated, and the only motives and feelings depicted are sordid, egotistic, and miserable, except in the young narrator, whose childish intelligence is so slowly awakened to the baseness of those around him, but whose naturally honest and patriotic little soul burns and thrills with shame when once it becomes conscious of the meanness and cowardice of his family and of his neighbours. The highest literary faculty seems to me to show itself in the completeness with which the childlikeness of the young observer is retained, the vague apprehension, the slowly awakening comprehension, the gradually dawning horror with which the events around him impress themselves on a mind remaining instinctively loyal and just in the midst of corrupt and unworthy examples.

Take this as an example of its style :—

'Shouts are heard afar off in the woods.

'"Ah, my poor child!" says my aunt, weeping, "what a hideous thing is war!"

'She looks very feeble, very worn, my poor great-aunt Moreau. The sight of her thin face, her skeleton-like hands, moves me painfully. She sees this.

'"At my age," she murmurs, "these events, my dear, are hard to bear."

'However, she assures me the Germans are not very cruel. The Captain in command of those billeted on her, despite his rude exterior, is not uncivil. *Georges Darien*

'At that moment, indeed, this officer returns with his men; his heels ring on the bricks of the ante-chamber. He opens the door of the little room where we are sitting.

'"Do not be disturbed, Madame," he says, addressing my aunt, "on account of the firing you may have heard. There is nothing of any consequence. A wood-cutter, in whose hut we found arms, and whom we have shot: nothing more."

'He salutes and retires. My aunt shudders. She turns white, her eyes close, her head falls back against the chair. She is faint. I call her maid, who runs to my summons, with the cook and the servant just come to fetch me. The three women try and revive her. She remains so weak when again conscious, that they carry her to her chamber. She is grieved to have fainted.

'"When my dear little Jean came to see me," she murmurs! "It was the thought of that poor wood-cutter—"

'She trembles like a leaf as I leave her.

'Germaine, who has come from my grandfather's to fetch me, asks me to wait a moment; she has a message for the Prussian Captain from my grandfather. The officer is walking up and down, smoking, under the lime-trees. I hear his guttural voice as he answers, "Tell your master that I shall expect him here." What can this mean? When I reach my grandfather's house I rush to the dining-room to

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question the old man, but Germaine catches hold of my arm.

'"You must not disturb Monsieur. He is engaged with someone."

'Through the door, which I hold half-opened, I have seen that someone. He is a person dressed like a peasant, who looks not like a peasant, nevertheless. His large hat is worn too gracefully; his ragged blue blouse is too old to accord with his proud and delicate features. Is he an officer of franc-tireurs? A French spy, perhaps? Is my grandfather giving or receiving information? Is he not, as I hope, planning to surprise the Prussians? I question Germaine. She is astonished at my anxiety.

'"That man? He wanted to see the Mayor, and as the Germans have put the Mayor in prison, he was brought here. Do not trouble yourself about him, Monsieur Jean."

'I hear a sound of closing doors. It is, of course, the stranger going away.

'My grandfather joins me.

'"Well, how is your aunt?"

'I tell him what happened, the story of the wood-cutter and its effect upon her.

'"Ah! what a pity!—humph, humph!—I will go and see her. Germaine, my cloak."

'"Shall I come with you, grandpapa?"

'"No, no; not worth while. I shall be back in half an hour."

'In twenty minutes' time he returns.

'"You see I am as good as my word. I made haste, eh?"

'"Is my aunt better?" *Georges*

'"Your aunt? Yes—no—that is, yes, much *Darien*
better."

'"Jean," he says to me after dinner, "you were to go back the day after to-morrow, but as I must go on business to Versailles in the morning early, I will take you with me. Does it disappoint you, eh?"

'"A little, yes."

'"Bah! you shall make up for it another time. You shall come again soon for several days, and send your lessons to the deuce."

'I laugh. I think I must have been mistaken. The man whom I saw must have been really a peasant. My grandsire could not be so gay if there were to be fighting at Maussy this evening. However, before going to bed I look out over the country, and when I lie down I strain my ear to catch a sound. All night long I cannot sleep; I can only listen. All at once a hand touches my elbow. I start up, screaming. Germaine laughs.

'"What is the matter, Monsieur Jean? Were you dreaming?"

'I stare round me in amaze. It is broad day.

'"Make haste and get up; the chocolate is ready; master is waiting."

'Half an hour later we leave the house. We are at the end of the street which opens on to the Versailles road, when a platoon of Prussian soldiers, with bayonets fixed, appears upon that road. My grandfather seizes me brutally and throws me down under a fence behind a hedge. I look through the branches. The Prussians pass at quick march. Amidst them

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marches a man, with his hands tied behind his back. I see a broad-leafed hat, a pale proud face, an old blue blouse. It is the man of yesterday. I know him at a glance.

'"Grandfather, who is that?"

'"Eh! Who? who? Some vagabond a Prussian patrol has picked up out of some ditch. The Prussians are very severe for—for—for wayfarers. It is better not to be seen in these affairs—it is better not to be mixed up—I mean—'

'My grandfather is lying, I am certain; I feel it. Why should he lie? Where are they taking this fettered man? Why force me to lie hidden under a hedge? From behind the village a loud volley thunders through the air.

'"Grandpapa, grandpapa, did you hear that?"

'The old man is livid.

'"It is the Prussians who practise—who practise at firing—in the morning. It is their custom—their custom—every morning—"

'His teeth chatter.'

Or see this description of the troops leaving for the frontier:—

'To-day the last regiment quartered here goes to the front; it is a regiment of the line.

'Leon and I wait in the market-place to go with the soldiers to the railway station.

'It is an epic, this departure of the troops. I have never felt what I feel now. There is a sense and scent of battle in the air; the midsummer sun shining on the

musket-barrels and sparkling on the accoutrements sets fire to one's brain. The earth trembles under the passage of artillery which is about to vomit death; and one's heart dances in one's breast whilst the ponderous caissons, with their iron-circled wheels, shake the stones, and the mouths of the bronze guns display their yawning jaws. Bands play warlike tunes, men chant the *Marseillaise*, the gold of epaulets and the lace on uniforms glow in the light; the flags flap against the flagstaffs, on whose summits eagles spread their wings; the shoes of the chargers glitter like silver crescents; and one feels some mighty spirit of war soar above these hearts of flesh and of iron who are about to face the shock of battle. The blood steams in one's veins; the fever of the hour devours one; and one shouts louder and louder, faster and faster, not to become mad.

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'It is market-day. The square is filled by country people who have brought in their vegetables and fruits for sale. Their stalls are under all the trees, and, here and there, take up the pavement. We are standing between a woman selling salads and an old man who has onions, and is on all fours beside his skips, because every moment or so an onion slides off the heap and rolls towards the gutter, unless he stops it. What a funny old fellow he is to take so much trouble for an onion! Ah! there goes another one! The old man hurries to catch it, but an officer, booted and spurred, steps on it; slips, slides, tumbles down. The onion-seller takes off his cap: "Oh, sir! a thousand pardons!"

'The officer gets up, takes his riding-whip by the

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whip-end, and brings it with all his force on the uncovered head of the old man, who falls backward on his skull. Blood bespatters his skips of onions.

'"Here comes the regiment!" screams Léon.

'The band sounds at the end of the street. We run towards it.

'"Did you see the poor old man?" I ask.

'"Yes. He deserved what he got. Only think! The officer might have broken his legs, eh?"

'I do not answer. I am absorbed in watching the soldiers whom we escort, walking on the pavement, keeping step with them.

'The soldiers do not all keep step with one another; emotion, enthusiasm, the delights of going to thrash the Prussians, the natural sorrow at leaving those they love—a thousand different feelings. There is an old soldier, a decorated soldier next to me, who is very unsteady on his legs. A young officer, very young, almost beardless, puts his musket straight on the old fellow's shoulder every second. It is admirable to see the harmony which reigns between privates and officers. The Colonel, a greybeard, salutes with his sword when the people cheer him; and a trumpeter in the front rank has stuck a great bouquet of roses to the banner of his instrument, and carries it as a priest carries the host. Other nosegays are thrust into the barrels of muskets. Bottles of wine show their corks from under the piles of knapsacks, and two or three dogs are stretched out on the haversacks in the baggage-waggons. The crowd cheers the dogs.

'All the peasants throng to see, shouting their

applause to the regiment. Before the chemist's shop at the corner, a knot of young men wave their caps in the air; the chemist waves his white handkerchief; behind him I see the blue blouse of the old onion-seller, who lies unnoticed on the ground.

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'All at once the music breaks out into the *Marseillaise*.

'"Allons, enfans de la patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé!"

'Oh, how beautiful it all is! The soldiers fall into line. The populace, shouting and cheering, accompanies them to the station. Through the bars of the station-gates a private passes me his drinking-cup, and asks me to get it filled at the wine-shop in front of the gates.

'"Wait; here is the money."

'But I do not wish for the brave fellow's money, I have a franc in my pocket. I will pay for his pint. In a moment I run back again.

'"Thanks, young sir," says the soldier. "It is perhaps the last drop I shall ever drink."

'"The last!" cries Léon, red as a turkey-cock; so proud is he to be able to rouse the spirit of a warrior. "The last? Ah! we shall give you floods of wine when you come back from victory."

'The townspeople, who are crowding round us, cheer. The soldier shakes his head dubiously.

'"Thanks all the same," he says sadly.

'He does not seem very confident of success.

'"Doubt that we shall be victorious?" says Léon in disgust as we go homeward. "Leave the town for

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the frontier with so little confidence! I would give—oh, what wouldn't I give?—to be old enough to go and beat the Prussians. My dear Jean, that soldier has no soul!"

'I am not sure. The soldier perhaps does not look on the campaign as a picnic. Perhaps he sees more clearly than we do? Perhaps? A great many things I had never thought of before crowd into my brain.'

A few days later, after Sedan, Jean sees the Germans enter Versailles.

'"Here they are!"

'It is the octroi-guards who cry out this as they come flying from the gates across the town. They brush me roughly as they pass, and their abject terror gains on me.

'I follow them. But as I run I see on the other side of the boulevard five or six inquisitive persons, who have stopped in their walk, and hide themselves behind the trees. If they stay to see, why may not I? I, too, get behind the stem of a tree, and I watch with staring eyes to see what will happen. On the road, fifty yards from the gates, a dozen horsemen are coming onward at a walk. They stop a moment before the octroi-officers; then they come on into the town in two lines, almost touching the pavement.

'"The Uhlans!" says someone behind me. Ah, I think with a thrill, these are the Uhlans!

'They draw near us; their pistols are cocked.

They pass me close, and I feel that I shall fall from fright; my nails clutch the bark of the tree which screens me. These riders are covered with blood. There is blood on the pennons of their lances, on the hocks of their horses, on the rents in their torn uniforms, and one of the foremost has a white linen band stained with red on his forehead. Ah! it is hideous! I want to run away—I want to run away; it is impossible. Before me there are these Germans, riding slowly, searching with piercing glances the streets which open out to the left and to the right. Behind them comes on a dense dark mass. One can hear the tramp of feet. One can distinguish the spikes of helmets, the barrels of muskets, the little drums no bigger than tambourines, and the fifes which are playing a march. These drummers and pipers are followed by linesmen in dark blue, shod with boots drawn up above their trousers, the musket held straight on the shoulder, the cloak rolled.

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'And these men, grey with dust and mud, black with powder, with their coats in rags—these men, who fought no doubt this morning, and who have just made a forced march—preserve the most marvellous exactitude, the most perfect regularity in the dressing of their ranks, and the rhythm of their steps keeps measure from the first line to the last of the whole column.

'They pass—they pass—they will never end. I have almost forgotten my fear. I am partly in front of my sheltering tree. The drums and the fifes cease to sound, and music replaces it from a band marching

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in front of a group of staff-officers. They play a warlike march, a battle-hymn, and all down the line of troops, from the foremost company which has reached the Chateau of Versailles, to the last which is leaving the Chesnay, shouts of triumph arise and drown the brazen voice of the cymbals. The victorious chant thunders down the wind. It is the *Marseillaise*—the *Marseillaise* which our own troops played as they left for the frontier, the hymn which was to render every French soldier invincible, which I had sung myself when we had been so sure of supremacy, and when I had planted my little tricolour flags on the map, all along the route from Paris to Berlin in a Via Triumphalis!

'Now the artillery comes on; its black cannon on their blue gun-carriages, with their attendants on foot and in saddle, wearing helmets surmounted with brass balls. There are flowers in the mouths of the cannon, and they are garlanded with ivy and green boughs. The cavalry follow on the artillery; dragoons, cuirassiers, hussars with white facings and a death's-head on their shakoes. Then come the carriages, the waggons, the vehicles with ladders, the baggage-carts. . . . All at once my heart sickens and stands still. Behind the wheels of the last waggons I seem to see some red cloth. Yes, it is our red cloth—our soldiers. Between two rows of Prussians, who have their bayonets fixed, our prisoners march without arms, dirty, ragged, miserable, and ashamed. There are at least two hundred of them, and I strain my eyes after these, my countrymen, who are destined to rot in German fortresses.'

It seems to me that in no contemporary fiction do we possess studies of spectacles, of sentiments, of street-life in a momentous hour, more accurate, more vivid, more simple in diction, more touching in suggestion, than in the above passages.

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The sustained and withering irony and censure in this sketch, which yet never goes out of the selected orbit of a boy's observation and experiences, seem to me to be perfect in their kind. The incompleteness of the child's understanding gives only a keener incisiveness to the satire embodied in his narrative. The general reader will never forgive such portraits as that of the elder Barbier, who, after shouting, 'Sursum Corda! Prenons serment de défendre le sol sacré de la Patrie!' accepts the large Prussian orders, sets his steam-saws going in his timber yard, and furnishes the wood for the besiegers of Paris; or of that of the tobacconist Legros, who, after crying, 'Un soldat qui renie son drapeau? Qu'il crêve comme un chien!' stands bareheaded with bent spine to sell cigars to Bavarian officers. This is human nature: human nature as commerce and modern teaching and the cheap Press have made it; but Barbier and Legros will never pardon the limner who thus portrays them. To the reproach that such portraits are nearly always those which he selects, Darien would, no doubt, reply that it is not his fault if they are what have been in his path to the exclusion of finer and nobler figures. He is a realist in the full sense of that often-abused word, and he has the courage to represent the realities which he finds.

The *Année Terrible* casts its black shadows over

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the childhood of this writer, and as long as his life shall last the gloom it has left will stay with him. If France herself should ever forget, which Heaven forbid, he will not do so. His soul has been dipped in the Styx.

What will, no doubt, alienate from him a large number of readers will be his almost absolute want of human sympathy, or, at least, of expressions of such sympathy. It is exceedingly rare with him to give way to any sign of any emotion of pity. He sees human nature, in all its phases, with little compassion for it. He sees (and this is, too often, either through weakness or through policy, ignored by writers and thinkers) that the great majority of men are neither the martyrs nor the heroes, neither the victims nor the tyrants of their time, but a mass considerable alone by its numbers, inconsiderable by any mental or moral worth, and chiefly absorbed in different forms of selfishness and the desire of gain. It is probably an error, though one consecrated by usage and talent, to represent the generality of human beings as worthy subjects either of blessing or of curse. But the author who says so will never be forgiven by that mass of mediocrity which forms nine-tenths of the population of the world. Darien says it, and shows it, and it is this which will always make his works appear dreary and depressing to the general reader, who cannot accept and pardon this manner of looking at life for the sake of its veracity and courage.

Of course, also, in the Press generally, the accusation of exaggeration is always brought against exposures and delineations which are unwelcome and

embarrassing. But the writer's word may certainly be taken for it that nothing in his descriptions is exaggerated or invented, and many recent inquiries into the causes of deaths in the ranks, and of executions after summary, and almost secret, court-martial in Algeria, have confirmed the veracity of the statements made in *Biribi*. The French Government, indeed, was, as I have said, so apprehensive of the effect of these on the public mind that, although it did not suppress the book, it forbade large coloured cartoons of the events described in it to be posted up on the boulevards. In all nations the public is treated like a child by authority; and as a child who will only walk straight and submissively if its eyes be bandaged and its feet hobbled.

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But in these pages we are not so much concerned with the political and military side of these works as with their literary qualities; and these are considerable and of a strong and rare originality of style. *Il vous empoigne*, and it is impossible to read either of his two works without recognising their courage and ability, if we feel pained by their withering scorn and rugged wrath. They are at times hard as the stones over which the sick and swooning soldier is dragged, tied to the tail of a mule. They are at times ferocious as the licensed torturer with the three stripes on the sleeve, who throws his helpless prisoner, gagged and bound, on the burning sands. Terrible they always are, with all the terror of truths which have been lived through by the person who chronicles them. It is not any betrayal of confidence to say that the author of *Biribi* has experienced in his own

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person the tortures of which the dread record is made under this little playful-sounding word. After such scenes as are herein described, and such sufferings as these, the blood in a man's veins cannot be rose-water. 'La haine c'est comme les balles; en la mâchant on s'empoisonne.' And it is impossible that the military system can beget any other than hatred, violent, unforgiving, imperishable, in the victims of that system.

'A young soldier, a conscript, a chasseur à cheval, has lost two cartridges as the battalion is about to leave for Tunis.

'The Corporal informs the Captain in command, who turns and looks in silence. The boy Loupat gazes at him with the eyes of an animal watching the descent of the club which is about to brain it, and from which it knows not how to escape.

'In passing through Tunis the Corporal says to him, "We shall leave you here. That will teach you to sell your cartridges."

'The boy understands. The council of war, the sentence as a thief, the indelible shame stamped on the brow of a youth because he has lost two of the cartridges of the State! The following morning the bugle sounds the *réveil* at four o'clock. It is still dark. At twenty minutes to five the company, with knapsacks on their backs, is drawn up in line on the road which runs through the camp. The trumpets sound the roll-call, and all down the line each man answers "Present" as his name is spoken.

'"No one is missing?"

'"Yes, Loupat, my Captain."

'"Loupat is absent?"

'"Yes, my Captain."

'"The scoundrel! He has slunk off in the night to escape court-martial, but we will find him. Go on. No one else missing?'

'"Look there!" A soldier points to the gymnasium. All the men look where he points. Under the portico, on the great architrave on the left, a body is swinging, black, at the end of a cord.

'A lieutenant runs to the place, climbs to the body takes hold of it, lets it go, returns.

'"Dead?" says the officer in command. "Is it Loupat?"

'"He is already cold."

'"The scoundrel!" says the Captain again. "Well! he has done justice on himself. Right flank, march!"

'We are crowded pell-mell into the railway waggons which are bound for Tunis. I look through the opening in the door and see far away below me—already far away—a small dark shape which swings in the wind as on a gibbet, and which is lighted solely by the first rays of the rising sun.

. . . . . .

'Another soldier, Barnaux, has had some liqueurs given him by a comrade; Barnaux is drinking with the men of his *marabout*, when a sergeant enters, espies the irregularity, takes the offender before the officer in command.

'Barnaux refuses to say who the giver of the liqueur was. The Captain orders him to be put in irons. They have put him *à la crapaudine*, that is, with his

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arms bound behind him and chained to his ankles. He is cast down thus on the sand of the camp. Because he moans with pain they gag him with a dirty rag, they tie his chin to his head with a cord. He remains all the night thus, tied up into a shapeless packet. In the morning when they change sentinels they perceive that he is dead. The gag has stifled him.

. . . . . .

'Then the horror of the hospital; those hells which these men so dread that they will tear the bandages off their wounds, or cut their veins with a bit of broken glass, rather than live to enter them.

'The muleteers set us down at a great tent which serves as an infirmary; within there are planks on trestles and large pails filled with reddened water.

'"You see that," says Palot, who has divined with the instinct of the dying the destination of those sinister planks. "Well, that will be my last bed."

'An assistant, a filthy apron round his body, signs to us to enter.

'The great tent is an unutterably miserable place; it has been battered about by wind and weather; the currents of air blow unchecked through it, and clouds of dust arise from the ground. Some twenty iron beds are there, not more; and beyond those a pile of mattresses, on which men are lying, rolled up in rough counterpanes. There are not sheets enough for all. They make a sick man rise and give up his place to Palot, whose pulse the surgeon feels.

'"Done for," says the doctor, between his teeth, without heeding whether Palot hears him or not.

'To the rest of us they assign the mattresses lying

on the earth; these are full of vermin; they throw on us some covering, stained with the vomit of our predecessors. *Georges Darien*

'How wretched it is, this hospital! How weary are the days passed, with no other companions than the dying, whose characters are poisoned by suffering and whose cries of horror and anguish ring in one's ears! When, moved by the disgust and despair which comes over you in this fœtid hole filled with filth and misery, you drag yourself out on your trembling limbs into the sun, you feel so feeble, so exhausted, so helpless, you cannot walk a step. You sit down in the torrid heat; you are chilly, despite the high temperature; your teeth chatter, your body is drenched with sweat. And at evening you are obliged to return to the tent, where you pass such hideous nights, troubled by such frightful nightmares, by such vague sudden shapeless terrors, which seem to seize you by the throat and freeze the blood in your veins. Oh! those horrible nights when you see the dying shake off their covering with shrunken fingers and try to raise their haggard faces, lighted by the yellow-green rays of a lanthorn!

'These nights in which the living, who so soon will be the dead, clutch at the rags which cover them, and shriek with rage and fear as though they saw an enemy descend on them! These nights in which one hears the childlike sobs of young Palot, who is delirious, and who in his long agony calls on his mother, "Mamma! Mamma!"

'They will ring for ever in my ears those two piteous words which through three whole nights fill

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that wretched place with their unpitied lament. A lament, low and tender at first, broken with choking tears, ending in screams which make one's hair stand up on one's skull with horror. The desperate screams of a perishing life which has lost all sense and measure of things or of time, of one who knows only that he will die, and in one supreme appeal protests against his severance from those he loves.'

. . . . . .

And the youth Palot dies in that appeal, and they dig a hole in the red clay under a low wall beside a Barbary fig-tree.

'Ah! poor little soldier, who breathe your last, calling on your mother; you who, with your glazing eyes, saw the vision of your home; you who are laid there, at twenty-three years of age, to be devoured by the worms of that foreign soil on which you have suffered so much, and where you have met your death alone, forsaken, without a friend to soothe your last struggle, without a hand to close your eyelids, except the brutal hand of the hospital servant, which shut on your mouth like a muzzle when your desperate cries disturbed his sleep. Ah, I know why your sickness was mortal; I know it much better than the surgeon whose steel dissected your emaciated body; and I pity you, poor victim of the State, with all my heart and soul as I pity your mother who waits for you, counting the days of your absence, and who will only receive in her solitude the dry official notice of your death!

. . . . . .

'Ah, no! I will not pity you, young dead soldier, nor your mother who mourns your loss! I will not pity you, sons, who are killed by the drinkers of blood, mothers who conceive what they send to the shambles. Mad women who endure the pangs of childbirth only to give up the fruit of their womb to the Minotaur which devours them! Know you not that the she-wolves let themselves be slain sooner than lose their offspring; that there are beasts which die of grief when their cubs are borne away from them? Do you not understand that it would be better to tear your new-born creatures limb from limb than to bring them up for one-and-twenty years, only to throw them into the hands of those who want their flesh to feed the cannon? . . . And you would ask our pity when, in some dark hour, the end comes, and the bones of your children are gnawed by hyænas and whitened by the sun in some forgotten corner of the earth?'

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There are many such passages in *Biribi*, burning with truth and with pain; and it would be well if they could be stamped into the mind and the memory of the peoples of this epoch, who go meekly and stupidly as sheep to the slaughter, under the pressure of their sovereigns and statesmen. Of course, such a teaching as this carries with it its own condemnation by what is called authority, and by all those classes of which I have spoken, to whom war is a necessity and a standing army is the ark of the Government. But it would be well if the populace of every country could read, learn, and digest it, and realise its truth and its justification. As I have said, I place *Bas les*

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Cœurs higher, in a purely literary sense, than *Biribi*, in the sense of construction and of concentration. For *Biribi* is abrupt, at times confused; is rather a series of terrible records and tragical incidents than a consecutive and harmonious narrative, although it relates the career of the same soldier from the time when he enters the ranks, to the last day in which he flings from him for ever the grey coat and *kepi* of the punishment-battalion. In that punishment-battalion he has been placed, let the reader remember, for no especial crime against law or decency, but for those offences against the military code (the unwritten code) which make the offender more guilty in the eyes of a court-martial than any actually criminal accusation: to have lost a regimental article, to have forgotten to salute a superior, to have stopped to drink at a brook on a march, to have omitted to put the regulation number on a clothes brush or a pewter platter, to have been out without leave, to have lost cartridges or buttons—any one of those innumerable and incessantly recurring actions or omissions which make a soldier an *insoumis* to his military superior, whether sergeant or general, corporal or colonel, which to the military mind constitute crimes too heinous to be named, offences which fill a punishment-book with accusations of acts in which only the semi-insanity of perverted authority could see any provocation. Read only of the punishment of the *tombeau* for simple sins of negligence or thoughtless mirth. The *tombeau* is a canvas cover, stretched on stakes, making a cage a mètre long by sixty centimètres wide, into which the soldier condemned to this torment is obliged to creep

on his stomach as best he can. In this cage he spends days, weeks, months, at the caprice of his tyrants, with a litre of water as his only drink, and nothing but the canvas between him and scorching heat or icy rain, or blinding desert dust. On hot days the water in his little can evaporates rapidly; and at the will of the corporals in charge of him he may be kept thirty-six hours without other drink and without food at all. Remember, as you read these lines, that the *tombeau* has been the home for months of the man who describes it; a home on the scorching Algerian sand in the parching African weather; a home in which he envied the jackal its lair and the vulture its wings; a home in which his flesh rotted and his manhood swooned.

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It is, perhaps, the finest compliment one can pay to an author to be so much impressed by his theme that one almost forgets to speak of his purely intellectual qualities. It is difficult to treat of either of these works in a coldly critical spirit. For they are written with tears of blood—such tears as are wrung from the heart's depths of all those by whom France is beloved.

For if militarism be her only armour, her only resource against her foes, then must we tremble for her indeed; and tremble no less for the whole of Europe, of which all the male youth is bruised and crushed under militarism as in a mortar. The charge of want of patriotism has been brought against Georges Darien for both these volumes. But it is the flaw in human nature, not in French nature only, which he exposes; the cynicism, the selfishness, the

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cowardice, the meanness, which are so conspicuous in all modern society, in all nations and in all grades. Were there a German invasion of Italy or of England next year, there would probably be as many Italians or English ready to succumb to, to cringe before, and to profit by, the conquerors as there are Versaillais ready to do so in the volume called *Bas les Cœurs*. There is a moral motor ataxy in the spinal marrow of modern nationalities; the love of money, the fear of poverty, and the continual concentration of the mind on personal interests taught by modern education and by modern commerce make up a large percentage of human beings, who are mere time-servers, always ready to hold the stirrup-leather of the strongest. It is not alone the French bourgeois of 1870 who is satirised in these pictures of Versailles under German domination; it is the whole modernity of the last quarter of the nineteenth century under the teaching of modern science, modern trade, and modern morality. All humanity has been inoculated with the serum of concentrated cowardice and egotism; some are robust enough to resist the contagion, but the majority absorb it and develop the disease. That which Darien calls not cowardice, but fear, is enormously developed by modern influences, and will probably continue to increase in the coming century. He asks himself and his reader of what elements is it composed that discipline, that blind obedience, which is enforced in military life (and which is already demanded in civil life by the scientific and medical tyrannies). He replies, and it is a subtle distinction which will escape the comprehension of many, that

the soldier who thus cringes to base orders is not a coward but a craven (*pas un lâche; un peureux*). *Georges Darien*

'This craven would throw himself into fire or flood to-day to save a comrade's life; but he would blow his comrade's brains out to-morrow at the word of command of a non-commissioned officer. He is not base: he is frightened. His courage disappears before a watch-word: his boldness shrinks and vanishes under a regimental order. What cows him is the apprehension of punishment, the fear of the men set above him. Fear is the keystone of the ark of the temple of Janus. The army is a laundry where they throw the consciences of men into a tub of soap-suds, and where the characters of men are wrung and twisted like wet linen, and are placed, shapeless, under the wooden beater of a brutalising discipline. It is only by means of fear that the military system has been able to establish itself. It is only by such fear that it maintains its position. It is obliged to affect the imagination by terror, as it must extinguish the soul and sense of nations to prevent each from seeing farther than the stupid limit of a frontier. It is obliged to surround itself with a mysterious ceremony, with a religious pomp in which horror is united to magnificence; in which the trumpet-blast joins in the death-shrieks; in which one can see confused together the blood-stained robe of glory, the plume of generals, the handcuffs of gendarmes, the marshal's baton, and the dozen balls of the execution-volley, the golden palms of triumph and the shattered bones of the dead. It must present

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this spectacle to the crowds which stare and tremble before it as they stand open-mouthed before a charlatan quack doctor at a fair, whose tinsel and feathers attract them, but from whom they shrink alarmed as soon as they see a forceps or a lancet glitter ominously in his hand. It must do this in order that the people, always in ecstasy before the marvellous, which it does not attempt to analyse, shall be seized before it with awe and admiration: even as a savage who prostrates himself in terror and respect before the shooting-iron which he does not understand, but which he knows possesses the power to strike him to the earth.'

Many will protest against this figure as an insult to the general public, but like many other insults which carry an intolerable sting in them, it may claim that it is merited, and does not overpass the truth.

Darien writes with that force which can, indeed, only come from the intimate persuasion that what it tells mankind is true, and should be told.

'"It is commonly said," he continues, "that the army incarnates the nation. History puts this into our heads by means of all her subtlest lies. Ten martial anecdotes sum up a century; a boast describes a reign. History preaches hatred of the people, respect for the pillager, the sanctification of carnage, the glorification of slaughter. The weak, the sensitive, the timid succumb beneath it, and are buried in the red clay or left on the sand for the vultures and jackal. The strong (sometimes, not

always) lives to have his whole future poisoned by these memories, his whole temperament warped and embittered; or he forces his tormentors to shoot him by some unpardonable breach of discipline; some blow to a superior, or some intentionally insolent reply; death is the continually recurring sentence in the military code; if the man does not bend he must be broken: broken in two with a volley which smashes his spine. The punishment-battalions, the workshops of the Travaux Forcés, are the immediate consequences of the standing armies. Society, to protect its interests, makes of a young citizen a soldier, and of the soldier a galley slave at the first effort in him to shake off the yoke of that discipline which degrades and brutalises him, requiring like all tyrants and usurpers to support its rule by terror, to make itself dreaded that its prestige may dazzle and its tottering throne be secured. What society requires is an obedience passive and blind, a total imbecility, a humiliation which has no limit or hesitation; the response of the machine to the mechanic, of the dancing dog to the stick of his teacher. Take your man, make him surrender all free will, power of choice, liberty, and conscience, and you create and possess a soldier. To-day, at the end of the nineteenth century, there is as much difference between the two words, soldier and citizen, as there was in the time of Cæsar between two similar words—Milites and Quirites. The standing army is the corner-stone of the actual social structure; it is a force which sanctions and secures the conquests of force; it is a barrier raised much less to combat

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foreign invasion than to resist and paralyse the just claims of nations. Soldiers, those sons of the people armed against their fathers, are nothing more or less than gendarmes in disguise."'

This is surely absolute truth—that truth which is of all others most feared by those in authority; those who, whether as sovereigns, ministers, financiers, professional men, or tradesmen, live on and by the servility and gullibility of the nations.

'What is discipline except fear? The soldier is reared to dread what is behind him more than what he is forced to face; he must be more afraid of the fellow-trooper who will be told off to shoot him in the back, than of the adversary whom he is ordered to attack. The army is the incarnation of fear. The soldier must dread his commanders as a burnt child dreads the fire. He must never laugh at their absurdities, nor raise a voice against their injustice or their tyrannies. He must never speak. He must not even think. His superiors do both for him. If he laugh, or resent, or speak, or think, if he be neither a coward nor a dolt, he is a mutineer: he must be tamed, beaten, broken *à Biribi*.'

And when the dreamer, Queslier, says that it will not be long before the people will become awake to this abuse of them, and will see that the military caste is established on prejudices and interests hostile to them, and will arise and destroy it, Darien replies, with equal truth:—

'There will flow much water under all the bridges of the world before the people will have ceased to adore their vain idols bathed in blood and tears.' *Georges Darien*

Vain idols, indeed! For thousands of years the Juggernaut of military despotism has rolled over the living pavement of the prostrate multitudes, and there is no sign as yet that those multitudes will arise and shiver the blood-stained car to atoms. Darien has but little hope in the resistance of the people. He fears that the majority of them will always continue to be daunted, dazzled, made dumb and helpless by the powers which ruin and slay them. William of Germany makes his insolent and inhuman declaration that the soldier must slaughter his own progenitors if his 'war-lord' bid him do so; and yet William of Germany is allowed to continue his reign.

What are we to look for from nations which lie down to be stamped on thus? which lick the spurred boots of those who outrage them?

Biribi, and what *Biribi* represents, has its prototype in every country of Europe; and wherever Europe introduces her 'civilisation' there she introduces also her quick-firing cannon, her numbered battalions of slaves, her organised butchery, her pulverisation of virility and of volition, her destruction of initiative and of liberty.

England considers that such arguments as those contained in this book do not concern her because she has no conscription. But how long will she be able, or be allowed, to be free from enforced service? The present field-marshal, commanding-in-chief, Lord

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Wolesley, desires conscription. It may well be that events, in the not far distant future, may strengthen his hands and enable him to enforce it.[1]

'Ah, Mascarille! who wished to put history into madrigals!' cries Darien. 'History has given us Chauvinism (Jingoism), that epidemic which makes a nation run headlong like the Gadarene swine, to fall into the pit of absolutism! The army incarnates the nation, you say? No. It diminishes it. It incarnates nothing but force, brutal and blind, which lies at the service of whoever most pleases it; or—sad to say—whoever pays it highest. The army is the social cancer; is the octopus of which the tentacles drain the blood of the nations; the hundred arms and feelers which the people should sever with blows of their hatchets if they desire themselves to live.'

Such language is very strong, and will rouse strong opposition in those who have long been cradled in conventional opinions, and believe that the established order of society, now existing, is admirable and intangible, because it has had the force and the cunning to so establish itself. It is language which may, of course, be challenged by adverse argument, which may at anyrate be met by counter-statements deserving to be weighed against it; but it is language which is more needed than any other in the present state of Europe, with every nation armed to the teeth and every country an arsenal.

[1] This was written by me in 1897; England has not waited long to confirm the truth of it.

III

THE ITALIAN NOVELS OF MARION CRAWFORD

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I BELIEVE that the novels of Mr Crawford of which the scene and the characters are Italian are not among those of his works which are the most generally popular. This fact, if it be a fact, must be due to the general inability of his English and American public to appreciate their accuracy of observation and lineation. Nearly all of them have qualities which cannot be gauged by those to whom the nationality of his personages in these works is unknown. In my own works, of which the scene is in Italy, I have dealt almost exclusively with the Italian peasantry. Mr Crawford has devoted his attention to the middle and the higher classes. I do not think his portraiture of the Italian aristocracy always redolent of the soil, but that of the lower and middle classes is faithful to a wonderful degree. That side of Italian life which is given in *Marzio's Crucifix*, for instance, is drawn with an accuracy not to be surpassed. The whole of this story indeed is admirable in its construction and execution. There is not a page one would wish

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cancelled, and nothing could be added which would increase its excellence. It is to my taste the *capo d'opera* of all which he has hitherto done.

I think in his studies of the Italian aristocracy he has given them less charm and more backbone than they possess. He has drawn their passions more visible and furious than they are, and their wills less mutable and less feeble than they are in general. He seems to have mistaken their obstinacy for strength, while, if he have perceived it, he has not rendered that captivating courtesy and graceful animation which are so lovable in them, and which render so many of their men and women so irresistibly seductive. According to him they are a savage set of *berserkers*, always cutting each other's throats, and he does not in any way render that extreme politeness which so effectually conceals the real thoughts of the Italian gentleman, and which never deserts him except in rare moments of irresistible fury. No one remembers so constantly as the Italian of all classes that language is given us to conceal our thoughts, and no one lives so completely as the Italian does from the cradle to the grave in strict concealment of his thoughts even from his nearest and his dearest.

But in his Italian *genre* pictures, and in portraiture of the people whom we meet every day in society, Mr Crawford has a delightful pencil; little side studies also of more humble persons, which many writers would neglect, are charming in his treatment; take, for instance, the old priest of Aquila in *Saracinesca;* with how few touches he is made to live for us. We only see him once, but he

will always remain in our memory; in his white-washed room with its sweet smell from the pot of pinks, and his touching regret that he has never seen Rome, and at his age cannot hope to do so. *The Italian Novels of Marion Crawford*

His priests, by the way, are always excellently drawn, from the humble village vicar to the learned and imposing cardinal. He has penetrated alike their interiors and their characters with that skill which is only born of sympathy, and it is therefore perhaps only natural that he has not the faintest conception of the motives and views of the socialist and republican whom he dreads and hates.

All these charming little details, like the pot of pinks, can only be thoroughly appreciated by those who know intimately Italian character and habits; but they abound, and show so much of fine observation and delicate discernment in the author that one cannot forgive him for ever beating the big drum of florid sensation.

Let me not be understood to mean that crime, or the impulse of crime, is not a perfectly legitimate subject for the novelist; both can be made so, but they are only so when treated as Mr Crawford himself treats them in *Marzio's Crucifix*. When treated as he treats them in *To Leeward* and *Greifenstein* and *Casa Braccio* they are merely coarse and inartistic. He has a leaning towards melodrama which is chiefly to be regretted because it mars and strains the style most natural to him, and does not accord with his way of looking at life, which is not either poetic or passionate, but slightly sad, and slightly humorous, modern and instinctively super-

ficial, superficial in that sense in which modern society itself is so.

In *Marzio's Crucifix* he is perfectly natural, and one cannot but wish that he had never left that manner of treatment. Every motive therein is natural, every character consistent with itself. This naturalness in his characters is Mr Crawford's greatest attraction, and when he departs from it, as he does in such detestable melodramas as the *Witch of Prague* and *Greifenstein*, he is no longer himself. It is hard to understand that the same author can create the most delicate of aquarelles and the most glaring of posters, or why one who can draw so well and finely in silver-point can descend to daub with brooms in such gross distemper. If this be the price of versatility, it were best not to be versatile. But it is not versatility, because true versatility consists in possessing a many-sided power which flashes like a jewel of which all the facets are equally well cut. True versatility, moreover, does not consist in the mere change of subject, but in the change of style, of treatment of thought, in fact, the mutation of the entire mind of an author, such as brings it into entire harmony with its fresh field and its new atmosphere. There is no such change in these novels. Mr Crawford is Mr Crawford always. As he never loses himself in his creations, so he is always present in them to the reader; and his style never varies, whether he treats of horrible psychological mysteries in Prague or of pleasant carnival seasons in Rome.

He is not strong or forcible in tragedy. When it is incidental in his stories like the murder of Montevarchi,

or the attempted assassination of Ser Tommaso, it is admirably sketched in; but when it forms the structure and essence of a romance he fails entirely to give it sublimity; it becomes in his hands a mere scarecrow, which makes us only smile as its wooden hands beat the empty air. One feels that it is not his natural element, that he does not like it or feel at home in it, and has merely lent himself to it from some wrong impression that the public requires it; due, perhaps, to the suggestion of some unwise publisher or friend. The coarse melodrama with which some of his novels ends is not in unison with the characters or the scope of his work. It is quite true that, as murder is, in some circumstances, justified in actual life, so in some circumstances it may be used as a *dénouement* in fiction with perfect accuracy; yet it is always a violent ending which fully accords with romance of wild life or peasant life, but always jars, unless introduced with the most perfect skill, in stories of men and women of the world; because the evil passions of this latter class of persons are of a different quality, and find different modes of relief, from the primitive and barbarous satisfaction of killing enemies or rivals. All the influences and habits of society make it almost impossible for men and women of society to become assassins.

Now Mr Crawford can draw men and women of the world so well that it is a pity he so often goes out of his way to spoil his portraits of them with the bowl and dagger taken from a different phase of life from that in which they move.

He is always a gentleman, and he is at his best when writing of gentlemen in the society which he knows so

well. Duels are quite natural in good society everywhere, except in England, and no one since Charles Lever ever described them so well as Mr Crawford; but murders are not general in the world of well-bred people, indeed are not very often heard of out of the lowest strata of plebeian life.

In *Casa Braccio* a fine motive, that of the peasant of Subiaco's long-cherished vengeance, with its final satisfaction, both based on a mistake, is wasted, because no one can care in the least for the man who is slain, and the original sin committed by this victim (marriage with a nun), although it seems so great to Mr Crawford, appears to us no sin at all; so that his tragic end neither moves us nor satisfies in us any sense of justice. What are admirably rendered and true to life in *Casa Braccio* are not Griggs and Gloria, or Angus Dalrymple and Maria Addorata, but the peasants of Subiaco, Stefanone, with his long-cherished vendetta, and his wife, Sora Nanna, who wears her lost daughter's shoes because it would have been a sin to waste them. One regrets that two persons so perfectly natural and well drawn should be set on a pyre of flaring melodrama which obscures their portraits in its smoke and flame. Why could he not give us a story of Subiaco, passionate but natural, in which the action would have passed entirely in that interesting and little-known part of the Sabine mountains?

When I use the term melodrama, I mean by it that which mimics the tragic, but falls short of it; the tragic, imitated but so environed, that it loses dignity and has something of the inflated and grotesque. The melodrama in *Pietro Ghisleri*,

in *Taquisara*, and in *The Children of the King* is this kind of melodrama; it does not move us for a moment; we are, on the contrary, impatient of it in a modern period and history, with neither of which it has any harmony. In the latter story the conception of Rughero, though by no means new, is fine; but the frame in which this mariner is set lacks all fitness for such a figure; and the man whom he murders is not sinner enough, nor serious enough in his actions, for the reader to be moved to pardon the act as the author himself pardons it. If violent delights have violent endings, violent endings need strong provocation and clear explanation; they should appear to the reader to be inevitable, the offspring of an unavoidable result. To the reader such a crime as this should appear to be the inexorable justice of an inevitable retribution. But in the violent *dénouement* of *The Children of the King* the cause is trivial, the act under the circumstances improbable, and the rude shock of it is not in accordance with any of the other characters and with the light, careless modernity of the setting of this story.

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This defect of consistency, which is grave in literature, would be ruinous on the stage where action is so much quicker, and where the idiosyncrasies of each personage are so visible to the audience; and such a fault is the more vexatious because it shows that the author was never really absorbed in his own creations, was never so possessed with them that they dominated him and made him do what they chose, as Bulwer Lytton has said that the characters of every true novelist must do, because a character once conceived is like a child, being once begotten, it becomes

what it must, we cannot control the subsequent shape it takes.

Another defect of Mr Crawford's works is usually that their interest flags towards the close, that this close is too abrupt, and that it gives the reader the impression of the narrative being brought to an untimely end because the writer no longer cared about narrating it. This defect may be noticed in nearly all his stories, beginning with *Mr Isaacs*, in which it is conspicuous; and is startlingly and irritatingly visible in one of his latest, *Adam Johnstone's Son*; indeed, in the last-named story the conclusion is obviously totally different from what it was intended to be in the opening chapters. Now, a well-constructed novel may please you or not, may be attractive or offensive, but it will always be accurately conceived and harmoniously balanced; and nothing animate or intimate will be introduced into it which has not some bearing direct or indirect upon the plot. Nothing can be more incorrect than to excite the expectations of the reader by indications which result in nothing, sign-posts on a road which do but lead to a blank wall.

A grave violation of this rule is frequently to be found in the Crawford stories, no worse one than that in this story of Adam Johnstone's son, where a long chapter is occupied by an incident with a brutal Neapolitan carter on the Sorrento road. The man is knocked down by the hero, and endeavours in return to stab him; carabineers arrive and arrest the carter and not the Englishman (as in real life they unquestionably would have done). The whole incident, related with much spirit, is obviously only in its place, only pardon-

able as an episode, if the carter be destined to appear again and sate his thirst for vengeance on the hero. But he disappears from the scene for ever as the carabineers handcuff him. We neither see nor hear any more of him, nor does the Englishman hear any more of the matter, which in actual life certainly would have caused him much annoyance at the local tribunal. The appetite of the reader should not be tempted by dishes, which become a mere Barmecide's feast, in this manner. Some intention must have been in the author's mind when he created this scene. Why did he not carry out his intention?

In this manner many combinations and situations of the most interesting and uncommon kind are deliberately thrown away unused. He frequently introduces personages about whom he excites our liveliest interest, and whom he then forsakes or dismisses with an indifference which the reader does not share. It is as though a painter painted into his canvas numerous figures which he has never finished, though he sends out his picture as a finished work. The only novels of his which are entirely free from this defect are the *Cigarette Maker*, the *Three Fates*, and *Marzio's Crucifix*, and here I cannot resist (though it is not within the scope of this article, since its venue is America) pointing out how delicate, subtle, and clever is that story entitled the *Three Fates*. There is little movement in it, no incident of any note, its interest lies entirely in the development of character and in the evolution of feeling, but these are so treated that they suffice to hold the reader's charmed attention, and the study of the man whose hesitations and

tergiversations make the subject of it is one which may be caviare to the general, but which may be read again and again with sympathy and curiosity by those who can appreciate psychological problems. The persons in it are such as we may have known to-day or may know to-morrow; and the working of their minds and inclinations is traced with a masterly skill, and is as correct as a physiologist's diagram of the nervous system.

What to me is especially attractive in Mr Crawford's novels is the atmosphere of good breeding which one breathes in them. One feels in the company of a well-bred man. Their philosophy, their experiences, their views, are all those of a man of the world; and there is in them a tolerance and a total absence of prejudice (except in religious and political matters) which are refreshing, and which are a fair approach to, if not an actual attainment of, unbiassed liberality. There is in them no enthusiasm for anything, no altruism, no deep emotion. They are unfortunately entirely lacking in any perception of those myriads of other lives not human, but as sentient as the human, such as vibrates in every line of Pierre Loti's works. We have never in his novels any profound tenderness like that with which the Frères Rosny speak of the semi-humanity of inanimate things, or show us the dog gambolling on the wayside turf in all the simple joy of its youth and its pleasure in existence. To Mr Crawford as to Peter Bell, a primrose by the river's side is a primrose, and it is nothing more, and the thrush or the linnet which sings in the hawthorn above the primrose roots for him has no existence.

He has the American's indifference to all created things which are not human. There are no animals in his books except two poor terriers (who have their necks broken by the odious lover in *To Leeward*), and the unhappy cat, introduced only to be poisoned in *Taquisara*. There is nothing which indicates that he cares for nature in any of its phases, and he calls the cicala a locust.

In Italy he lives only for the people around him as he would live in Pall Mall, or Broadway, or the Champs Elysées. That passion with which Italy has inspired Shelley, Byron, George Sand, De Musset, Owen Meredith, even the calm analytic mind of Taine, has never touched him. He has never felt the ecstasy which is embodied in that single phrase of Taine's, 'On nage dans la lumière.' One would say that the moonlight shining on the waters of Tiber, under the bridge of St Angelo, is no more to him than a flash-light illumining a grain-elevator on the Hudson. All which is still Italy, of colour, of perfume, of light, of legend, of rapture, of emotion, has wholly escaped him; he has never felt its *hysterica passio;* he has never known its eternal youth, he has never seen its lost gods rise and walk through its blossoming grass as the star rays shine in the white cups of the narcissus of its fields. But of the people who pass him in the Corso and on the Chiaja, who shake hands with him at Montecitorio and on the Lung' Arno, who lounge and talk with him at the cafés, and the legations, and the public gardens, he is an admirable student, and an admirable photographer.

One of the most admirable of his portraits is that of

the young Don Orsino, the hero of the novel of that name. Sant' Ilario, like his gallant old father, might be a North German, a Hungarian, or a Scottish noble, his temperament is, indeed, much more northern than southern; but Don Orsino,[1] his son, is exactly that which he is represented to be, a youthful Italian of high rank, who has been educated at an English public school, and has all the vanity, and egotism, and *sécheresse de cœur* of modern youth in him. The type of the modern youngster of rank was never so well drawn as in this story of his *début* in speculation and his failure in it. His character is one very difficult to draw, that coldness, that self-reliance, that self-sufficiency, which are something at once harder and less contemptible than conceit, the qualities which will make him successful later on but will never make him lovable or tender; the instincts of race which hold him back from meanness but are not strong enough to raise him to nobility, attenuated as they have been by modern education, all these are rendered with the utmost skill till the boy, in his sterile and self-satisfied modernity, lives before us, and vain and selfish though he be, we are loth to part from him, and curious to know what his future will become. In his history that one supreme charm of Mr Crawford's, of which I have previously spoken, his naturalness, is conspicuous; nothing can be more natural than the relations of Don Orsino with his mother and father and those who surround him, and

[1] A novel called *Corleone* reproduces Don Orsino, but was published after these pages had been printed. It has been very popular, but in it, unfortunately, Don Orsino is given away deplorably, and turned into a mere romantic lover, which in real life he never would have become.

the crafty *affaristi* who get him into their meshes of speculation.

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What is not natural in this story is the character of Madame d'Aranjuez. She comes before us instinct with all which goes to make up an unscrupulous adventuress. She is that, or she is nothing. She does her uttermost to fascinate and capture the son of Saracinesca. She succeeds; and lo! with one of those *volte-faces* which are so frequent and so irritating in Mr Crawford's works, she gives up the game when she has won it, does nothing that we expect her to do, and marries the speculator who has beggared Don Orsino on condition that this gentleman shall restore to Don Orsino all he has lost. Nothing more improbable or inconsistent, given the character of the woman, could possibly be conceived; nor is it more probable that the haughty and irascible young man would endure to be served by her mediation, however it might be veiled. Everything surrounding this lady promises us passion, intrigue, perhaps tragedy, certainly peril, but we are balked of them all. The mysteries concerning her turn out to be very tame ones indeed, she appears a wholly innocent and harmless person, and even a very large paper-knife shaped like a dagger, which we are told always lies beside her and which has no *raison d'être*, unless it is to be ultimately used in killing or defending somebody, does nothing whatever and disappears from the story, leaving us in tantalising ignorance of why we were ever introduced to it.

Now no French writer of any degree would have created that remarkable paper-knife, and kept it lying beside the heroine, and laid stress on its unusual size

and splendour, unless he intended to turn it to account as a *deus ex machina*. To draw the reader's attention to a conspicuous object, and then to cheat the expectations raised concerning it, is a great fault in art; but it is one of which English and American writers are continually guilty. It is true we are told casually, towards the end, that her husband had hit her with this paper-knife, and that for this blow the famous fencer Spicca had killed him; but this is mentioned incidentally, and does not sufficiently account for the interest we have been excited to take in this weapon. Spicca is, on the contrary, admirably drawn, and the regard we feel for the merciless old duellist is roused in us with true art. We have that sense of Spicca having really lived, and really been that which he is described, which can only be aroused in a reader by life-like accurate and sympathetic portraiture.

There are many pathetic touches in this portrait of Spicca, and little incidents entirely true to the life of an Italian gentleman of aristocratic race and straitened means, as when in his distress of mind his servant persuades him to eat 'a little mixed fry' with a fresh salad, 'the salad is very good to-day'; and Spicca, touched and refreshed, examines his meagre purse and takes out a ten-franc note which he gives to the man, remarking that it will buy him a pair of boots, and this ten-franc note is, when his purse lies on the table at night, slipped back into it by the servant, who knows that his master 'never counts.'

I think the most exquisitely drawn of all Mr Crawford's many characters is this Count Spicca; because the character of a noted duellist who invari-

ably kills, and kills how and in what way he chooses, with profound indifference and unerring accuracy, is one very hard to make sympathetic to the general reader, and especially to the English reader, by whom duelling is abhorred. But Spicca is so perfect a gentleman, so sad and simple and calm, so natural and unassuming despite his deadly power, that no one can regard him without interest and even affection, and see him without sorrow ill-treated by a woman so extremely unpleasant as Consuelo Aranjuez, for whom he has done and suffered so much.

The fencing of Mr Crawford is always very accurate, and we hold our breath when Leone Saracinesca acts as his son's second. All this is quite true to life in Italy, where duels with the sabre or rapier are still of daily occurrence, and are resorted to after any insult, and after a mere difference of opinion or trivial impoliteness.

It is wonderful that these stories have not been appropriated for the stage by those unscrupulous thieves the London dramatists, for they are full of dramatic situations and of duologues in which the give and take is brilliant. Some have indeed the dramatic effect of inconsistency of which I have spoken, but all are full of fine suggestions for the theatre. *Saracinesca*, or *Sant' Ilario*, for instance, would be transferable to the stage with scarcely any alteration. It is full of incidents which would be most effective on the stage; and the strong emotions and sensational scenes which it offers would most certainly thrill and charm an audience.

One wonders also that their author himself does not

write for the stage, for his command of incident and of intricacies of circumstance would raise him high above many playwrights of the London theatre. There are scenes in nearly all his works which might be put upon the boards with scarcely any alteration, such as the duel between Don Giovanni and Del Ferice in *Saracinesca*, and the death scene of the librarian Meschini in *Sant' Ilario*, while the whole story of *The Children of the King* would furnish matter for a romantic drama were the causes for the crime in it made more credible.

Here let me note a small but irritating fault in these works, *i.e.*, the childish habit (common to writers of the last century) of naming characters after their calling, or after some moral characteristic. Meschini is the plural of the Italian adjective mean, cowardly, or contemptible, and is given to a man with these defects; while a very interesting person, a French artist famous in portraiture, is unfortunately burdened with the ridiculous and impossible name of Gouache. Mr Crawford is indeed frequently infelicitous in names. In *Casa Braccio*, the American lover of Gloria, a stagey sort of person, but one whom we are invited to regard with admiration and sympathy, is weighted with the shocking name of Griggs. Mr Crawford does not see that were Othello or Hamlet called Griggs, either would try to move the souls of men in vain. If a name does not matter to a rose, it does matter immensely to a character in a book; and there are so many euphonious names in use in the world that it is wholly unpardonable to select a ludicrous or ugly one. The poor little natural child of Gloria in this same novel is also burdened at its

birth by the name of Walter Crowdie, which, for a baby, has such a comical effect that the very pathetic position of this poor infant is rendered ridiculous by it. It is perhaps under the idea of being realistic that these droll names are selected to jar on tragic circumstances, but then Mr Crawford's stories are not realistic, and cannot be made so by this one expedient.

He has also another fault which is visible in nearly all his works, and is a grave one. He forgets at times the attributes which he has given to his chief characters. Thus Giovanni Saracinesca is described as a man of strong, noble, and reticent nature, and of intellect so superior that his wife tells him he will be very great some day; and he resembles, indeed, precisely, one of those men who become great leaders of other men. But in the sequel (where he is called Sant' Ilario) all this changes, and he behaves like an idiot, and of his great qualities we hear no more and certainly see nothing. And where we still farther follow his fortunes in the subsequent sequel of *Don Orsino*, he has sunk into complete self-effacement, so complete that he allows his son to be the associate and the debtor of that very Del Ferice whose utter baseness and vileness he knows so well, and who tried in the famous duel to murder him by foul play. Sequels are always ill-advised trials of the author's consistency and the reader's memory, and it would have been unquestionably better to have made Don Orsino stand alone in his history and not figure as the son of Giovanni Saracinesca and of Corona d'Astrardente. When a reader has followed with interest and sympathy the fortune of an impassioned lover it is trying to see him

standing in St Peter's 'a middle-aged man,' talking to a son taller than himself. Great art is required to make a character 'grow' quite consistently. The continuation of histories, thus, greatly pleased Anthony Trollope and Thackeray, but I cannot consider it a desirable thing in fiction.

Mr Crawford misses many opportunities of developing the capacity for analysis and deduction which he undoubtedly possesses. He is very observant but he is content to note a fact, he does not trouble himself to seek its origin or the influences which have made it the fact it is. When the two young people who wish to marry in *Marzio's Crucifix* discuss what their house shall be like, and what colour the walls and furniture, their biographer adds, 'Italians have lost all sense of colour.' This is true, but it is one of the most amazing, grievous, and extraordinary truths that exist; it is one for which I search in vain and in perplexity for an explanation. But Mr Crawford does not seek for any explanation. He states the fact and passes to another subject.

Again, in this sentence he begins well: 'It is of no use to deny the enormous influence of brandy and games of chance on the men of the present day. Something might be gained indeed if we could trace the causes which have made gambling especially the vice of our generation. But I do not believe this is possible.' That is to say, he does not care to be at the trouble of such an investigation, even though he adds the acute sentence that most of the men and women of the world of pleasure in our times exhibit 'the peculiar and unmistakable signs of physical exhaustion, chief of which is cerebral anæmia. They are overtrained and

overworked, in the language of training they are "stale."' *The Italian Novels of Marion Crawford*

He says in another place, 'Italians have no imagination.' This is but partially true; I am not sure that it is true at all. Their modern poetry is beautiful, more beautiful than that of any other nation. Their popular songs are poetic and impassioned as those of no other nation are, and one may hear among their peasantry expressions of singular beauty of sentiment and phrase. A woman of middle age, a contadina, said to me once, 'So long as one's mother lives, one's youth is never quite gone, for there is always somebody for whom one is young.' A rough, rude man, a day labourer, who knew not a letter, and spent all his life bent over his spade or plough, said to me once, one lovely night in spring, as he looked up at the full moon, 'How beautiful she is! But she has no heart. She sees us toiling and groaning and suffering down here, and she is always fair and calm, and never weeps!' Another said once, when a tree was hard to fell, 'He is sorry to come away, it has been his field so long.' And when a flock of solan geese flew over our lands, going from the Marches to the mountains on their homeward way, and descended to rest, the peasants did not touch them: 'They are tired, poor souls,' said one of the women; 'one must not grudge them the soil for their lodging.' Surely such ideas as these in people wholly uneducated indicate imagination in the speakers?

And what can he possibly mean by no poets, which he says in another place? Has he never read a line of Carducci? Much as we may mourn and resent Carducci's turncoat and reactionary

politics, no one can deny that he is a poet of the purest kind. Has he never heard the ringing stanzas of Cavallotti which sound like a clarion through the land? Has he never studied the exquisite if too erotic odes of D'Annunzio, or the touching verse of Stecchetti? There are others besides these who are true and fine poets also; and even in the ordinary verses written for newspapers (which in other countries are so poor and tawdry) there is frequently in Italy a true and delicate feeling and an adorable lyrical harmony which make one mourn to see things so fair wasted on so ephemeral a life.

It is through their imagination still more than by their vanity that Italians are led by unscrupulous political flattery and cajoled into disastrous political enterprises. They will believe anything if it be sufficiently captivating to their self-admiration and their fancy, and will dance blindfold on the brink of a bottomless pit. It is only an imaginative people who love so wildly, and kill themselves so madly for affection's sake, as the Italian people do. The other day, because a young soldier was sent to Africa, his brother killed himself in despair, and the father of the two youths then killed himself also. It is an inflammable imagination which makes the nation so easily led away by the promises and the phantasmagoria of glory with which unscrupulous statesmen have enticed it to the brink of ruin. It was its imagination which made it so credulous that when told by its victors that the disgraceful surrender of Makale was a victory, it believed and rejoiced, illuminated and hung

out flags, and never saw what a dupe it was being made until cruelly awakened from its delusions by the *déroute* of Abbu Carima.

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Mr Crawford has lived chiefly in cities, and in the cities, even in Rome, the Italian is much debased by contact with foreigners; the influence of foreigners on Italians is excessively bad, especially American and English influence; and in the cities also the preponderance of Jews is great. Innumerable persons who call themselves by Italian names and speak of Italy as their country are Jews and nothing else. A Finnish Jew known to me buys an Italian estate, and with the estate a title, which, by the payment of a large sum to a complaisant Government, he is allowed to adopt; he is decorated by the king for his munificent 'charities' in the land of his adoption; he marries an English woman, and their children masquerade as Italian nobility with not a single drop of Italian blood in their veins. Such 'Italian nobles' are numerous, unhappily, in modern Italy, and do immeasurable discredit to the nationality which they assume. In a generation or two their origin will be forgotten, and they will be taken by society in general to be what they pretend to be. Thus, unhappily, are great nations caricatured, old titles prostituted, and Italy accredited with sons not her own, with pretended offspring who are not even her bastards; persons who impudently affect her name and boast of her blood, when not one single hair of their head or fibre of their flesh has any affiliation to her.

What stifles Italian imagination, and kills the Italian

soul, is the passion for money; pure acquisitiveness or avarice, for the desire is to get, little or no pleasure is taken in spending. It is often alleged that this passion is due to their poverty; but poverty is not necessarily accompanied by avarice; the Irish people are very poor, but they are extremely generous; the Spanish people are so also. A comical instance of this stinginess occurred the other day at Milan: a rich tradesman had built himself a fine set of new premises, and opened his new establishment with much feasting; he sent fifteen francs to the municipality to be divided among the poor, and everyone applauded his liberality! This love of money, acquisitiveness, niggardliness, or whatever we call it, is too general not to be injurious to the Italian character; and it enters into all daily life and personal acts, and is frequently the chief motor power of marriage, of career, of education. And then added to this injurious power there is another which is more deleterious still, which weakens, debases, and falsifies the character from infancy: it is the direful influence of the Church. But to treat of this matter would occupy too much space, and would lead too far away from the stories of Mr Crawford, in which there is an unfortunate tendency towards approval of what he calls hierarchical government, although a tendency not strongly enough insisted on by him for it to demand minute examination. The powers of Mr Crawford, however, are limited by the narrowness of what is called religion, and the inability to see the higher side of these subversive opinions which he dreads, and which he has done his best to turn into

ridicule by putting them into the mouth of the half-mad artist Marzio.

Indeed, his bigotry on religious subjects is very droll to see in these days; and he speaks of 'unbelievers' in a tone worthy of Puritans in the days of the *Mayflower* pilgrims. It does not agree with the tone of his books, which is invariably the tone of a man of the world; as such he should possess that liberality of thought which is the chief, perhaps the only, virtue of his generation; and if he had possessed it he would undoubtedly have reached a much higher level, a much finer ideal, than he has actually done. It would seem as if he distrusted and checked the larger intelligence in him, as an over-cautious rider distrusts and checks a horse which only asks to be given a free rein to go at speed over a wide pasture; it would seem as if some extraneous 'influence' were always at his elbow to keep his reason cribbed, cabined and confined.

His religious prejudices have contributed to arrest his intellectual development, for they are puritanical and antiquated in a singular and lamentable degree. He speaks of *liberi pensatori* as the Church elders of Maine or Massachusetts might have done in the days of witch-torturing and atheist-burning. He thinks that the future great war will be between what he calls believers and unbelievers; and he looks forward with joy to the coming conflict when men shall again fly at each other's throat for the glory of God. This kind of mental cecity has its inevitable results: it makes him step lamely where he would otherwise walk with manly alacrity, and it makes him afraid to face the light of facts which his truer instincts tell

him are existing and incontrovertible. Is this the result of early education, of hereditary inclinations, of female or ecclesiastical influence? I do not know; but come whence it may, this taint of bigotry obscures his intelligence and stops his progress, and is matter of profound regret to those who see what he would have been without it.

Many passages in his works show that he has perceived and grasped the universal dominance of that corruption which so fatally exists in all Italian life, and one could wish that he would make a more complete exposure of it. Take this account of how the banker, Del Ferice, obtained the decoration for a syndic who was one of his political supporters :—

'Del Ferice, left to himself, returned to the question of the mayor's decoration. If he failed to get the man what he wanted, the fellow would doubtless apply to someone of the opposite party, would receive the coveted honour, and would take the whole voting population with him at the next general election, to the total discomfiture of Del Ferice.

It was necessary to find some valid reason for proposing him for the distinction. He could not decide what to do just then, but he ultimately hit upon a successful plan. He advised his correspondent to write a pamphlet upon the rapid improvement of agricultural interests in his district under the existing Ministry, and he even went so far as to compose and send some notes on the subject. These notes proved to be so voluminous and complete, that when the mayor had copied them he could not find a pretext

for adding a single word or correction. They were printed upon excellent paper with ornamental margins under the title of *Onward, Parthenope!* The mayor got his decoration and Del Ferice was re-elected, but no one has ever inquired into the truth of the statements contained in the pamphlet.'

These passages and others similar give one the conviction that Mr Crawford, if he had 'let himself go,' might have been a satirist of no slight force. He has preferred to write charming stories, ingenious in construction, but slight in development, to amuse his generation; yet there is, I think, abundant evidence that he might have done stronger things, perhaps may do them still. He has preferred to lead a seagull's life, skimming the surface of the deep and shunning its storms. But he might have led the petrel's. Probably all the influences of an agreeable social existence have tended to make him indolent and unwilling to raise tempests in it. Few resist the pressure of a social atmosphere. His book called *With the Immortals*, marred as it is by the incongruity and impossibility of its setting, shows that he can reflect if he likes, and can express his reflections. If this work had been cast in such a form as Mr Mallock's *New Republic*, or Sir Arthur Helps' *Friends in Council*, or Christopher North's *Noctes Ambrosianæ* it would have been remarkable for the arguments and dialogues contained in it. But the ghost-element, the supernatural scenic effects, kill its excellence. Dr Johnson, Heine, Pascal, Bayard, François de Valois and Cæsar are too ill-assorted for us to accept them

in each other's company, and the idea of these dead men being all able to converse in English, and all doomed to wear through ages the clothes they wore in life, is so comical that it destroys all interest and illusion which their conversation otherwise might excite. There is a regrettable inability in Mr Crawford to perceive the ridiculous. He lacks humour, and the perception of the incongruous is not alive in him; nor is there either any poetic feeling in his way of regarding life. He is essentially a citizen of the world as the world exists in this last quarter of the fast-fading century, and the Sirens sing not for him, though he dwells upon their shores.

Let him, therefore, appreciate more thoroughly his own very admirable powers, and confine himself to painting the men and women of his time and class, with all that cosmopolitan knowledge of them which he possesses. I should like to see from him an Italian novel of modern political life. He has, I make no doubt, had ample opportunities of studying its machinery and its intrigues. He can dissect with so much subtlety and correctness the brain and the temper of such a man as Del Ferice, that there can be no doubt a political novel from him, placed in Rome, would have alike accuracy and interest and irony. But he must clear his mind of some of its cobwebs, and he must realise that the 'unbelievers' and revolutionists, who at present horrify him, constitute the keenest intellectual element in Italy, indeed, the only healthy one, and contain the only hope there is, if this be but a feeble one, of any attainment by the nation in the future to any true liberty and cleanliness in political aims.

I cannot conclude these few remarks upon his Italian stories without a word of thanks to him for the pleasant hours he has often given me, and the gallery of interesting portraits with which he has enriched the memory of all those who read his novels.

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IV

LE SECRET DU PRÉCEPTEUR

Le Secret du Précepteur

AT the opening ceremony of a new free library at Lambeth in London, not many weeks ago, Sir John Lubbock is reported to have made the following remarks regarding fiction :—

'Sir J. Lubbock, in moving a vote of thanks to the Prince of Wales and the Princess Louise, remarked that the free libraries of London now contained more than 250,000 books, whilst last year over 100,000 people borrowed volumes, and on more than 2,500,000 occasions books were used in the libraries themselves. It was a fallacy to suppose that public libraries were only used by novel readers. The proportion of works of fiction used in the Camberwell libraries was only 65 per cent., and, of course, in this percentage were included nearly all the books used by children. It must also be borne in mind that it took a great deal longer to read a history or a work of science than it did to run through a story. Under these circumstances he thought it might fairly be said that the people of London exercised a very good choice in the books they read. He himself should be very sorry to

undervalue novels. Even nonsense was extremely refreshing, and he thought the English people had learnt more of their history from novels and from Shakespeare's plays than from books of history.'

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In these few sentences there are embraced the views entertained in general by the English nation with regard to the art of fiction. By the English nation it is, and probably always will be, regarded as on a par with chromo-lithography, the use of the kodak, and tight-rope dancing.

'Even nonsense is refreshing,' says this kind defender of romance. He might have added that this depends very much on the character of the nonsense; there is dull nonsense, strained nonsense, self-conscious nonsense, vulgar nonsense, which is duller than a dull sermon and heavier than heavy bread; the nonsense which dilates and delights the heart of the coarse and common fool, is as a stagnant and stinking pond to the cultured mind; and true nonsense, *i.e.*, *jeux d'esprit*, caricatures, parodies, 'exquisite fooling,' does not come under the head of novels at all.

Someone had apparently been objecting to the creation of free libraries on the score that they were chiefly used by readers of fiction, and in support of such libraries Sir John Lubbock (not venturing to make so heterodox an assertion as that the perusal of fiction *per se* is valuable and desirable) pleads that only sixty-five per cent. of the books borrowed were novels, and refers to the rapidity with which a novel can be 'run through,' as he phrases it, and proceeds,

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as an excuse for the perusal of fiction, to state that the English public chiefly derives its knowledge of history from novels and from Shakespeare's plays. This declaration, which is enough to make Mr Freeman turn in his grave, and Mr Froude writhe in his professorial chair, is, I believe, based on an exact truth, but it never appears to occur to the speaker that while the history to be learned from fiction and the drama is not of the purest kind, the fine art of an admirable book, as of an admirable play, contains many another lesson more valuable than even those of correct history to the reader who is capable of assimilating and appreciating it.

Sir John Lubbock kindly adds that he should be 'very sorry to undervalue novels.' Sweet and gracious condescension! He would be sorry to 'undervalue' Boccacio, Cervantes, Guerrazzi, Théophile Gautier, Merimée, Victor Hugo, Thackeray, Walter Scott, Fielding, Octave Feuillet, Georges Sand, and Bulwer Lytton! Admirable benevolence! A treatise on the ways of ants or bees must, of course, rank as an infinitely higher work than a mere study of the manners, characters, and passions of mankind. To peruse the former work is education; to read the latter work is recreation, not absolutely injurious, perhaps, but scarcely beneficial. Sir John Lubbock on an ant-hill has the sublimity of the scientist: Alphonse Daudet on human nature is a mere trumpery trifler.

It does not appear even to occur to Sir John Lubbock that a fine novel contains intellectual qualities of the highest kind, and combines in itself

the widest effects and the most delicate minutiæ of creative art. A fine novel should be no more 'run through' than the sculptures of the Vatican or the pictures of the Uffizi should be run through in ignorance and haste: common readers, like common tourists, may do so, but to do so is as gross and unpardonable an insult to the book as it is to the sculptures and the paintings.

Reflect but a moment upon all the divers and numerous qualities which are of necessity existent in the creator of a fine novel before it can be produced; not only imagination but wit, not only wit but scholarship, not only scholarship but fancy, not only fancy but discrimination, observation, knowledge of the passions, sympathy with the most opposite temperaments, the power to call up character from the void, as the sculptor creates figures from the clay, and, for amalgamating, condensing, and vivifying all these talents, the mastery of an exquisite subtlety, force, and eloquence in language. All these various gifts must be united in one writer before a fine novel can be produced; and when it is produced it requires (to be duly estimated) as cultured and as respectful a study of it as an educated traveller would take to the Vatican or to the Uffizi.

I have derived month by month, as it has appeared in the *Rèvue des Deux Mondes*, the most delicate and acute pleasure from the perusal of *Le Secret du Précepteur*, yet it is a pleasure which can only be obtained from it by a serene, leisurely, artistic enjoyment of its exquisite literary qualities. It is like a wine of which the bouquet can only be appreciated by

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educated palates. There is but little movement in it; the incident is slight, the situations derive their fascination for the reader not from their violence or their singularity, but from their perfect probability, and from their psychological interests; and the whole tone of it is kept carefully throughout to the smooth bantering semi-*gouailleur* tone of the opening recital. Ah, that style!—clear as water, delicate, full of grace, limpid, harmonious, exquisite! It has all the polished charm of the man of the world, and all the eloquence and brilliancy of the artist. I have heard a great ambassador in a beautiful tapestried chamber play the music of Schumann and Chopin and Bach with admirable and sympathetic *maestria*; the style of Cherbuliez reminds me of that *diplomât-virtuose*. We hear incessantly of the magical style of Paul Bourget; but beside the style of Cherbuliez that of Bourget is strained, tortuous, affected, artificial. The supreme excellence of that of Cherbuliez is its consummate ease, like the ease of a perfect manner in society. To employ all the resources of such a style is as great a delight to the master of it as the use of the rapier to the master of fencing, as the handling of the plastic clay to the sculptor. To relate a narrative in such a style is as warm and full a pleasure to the possessor of it as it is to the painter to create a winter's night or summer's day, youth or age, dawn or moonlight, a dance of nymphs, or a frolic of fauns, out of a few ground earths, a little oil, and a square of canvas. But to appreciate it the reader of it must bring with him some qualities on his own behalf.

There are in it none of those Anglicisms so irritat-

ing in the works of Bourget and others, such as Henry for Henri, Francis for François, 'window' for 'fenêtre,' 'le cab stoppait' for 'le fiacre s'arrêtait,' and so many similar disfigurements of the most polished and elegant language of the world. The temptation to use a foreign language is great when its expressions are such as no other language can equally well render. But who can think that 'cab' is better than 'fiacre,' or 'window' than 'fenêtre'? The French of Cherbuliez is the French of an elegant writer, of a man of the world, and is, beside that of 'les jeunes,' as a pure and limpid river beside a crooked and choked-up stream. Without their professorial jargon of psychology or their strained analysis, which so greatly fatigues the reader and resembles nothing so much as the efforts of a cyclist to run smoothly on a stony road, *Le Secret du Précepteur* is full of delicate and interesting studies of the human mind and character. Its especial triumph is to excite and retain the interest of the reader in a character which in the hands of most writers would have been either insignificant or absurd.

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The teller of the story is the preceptor himself, who, unlovely in face and form, filling a subordinate and somewhat absurd position, frankly confessing his own follies and errors, is yet the most lovable and the most dignified of men; the intellectual grace of the scholar and the philosopher wholly atoning for and effacing the inferiority of place and the deformity of features. He tells us of his own extreme ugliness, so that we are not deluded into thinking it a *belle laideur*, but accept it as what he calls it, an ugliness which, coupled with poverty, would scare all women

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away from him all the years of his life; but, despite of it, we feel the irresistible charm of his personality, we admire his tact, we adore his unselfishness, we are as delighted by his self-restraint as by his courage and his will, and we take leave of him with the regret which we feel when we part for an indefinite period from a companion of the finest culture and the warmest sympathies. We regret also that, like most unselfish persons, he is forced to be content with the crumbs of happiness instead of its bread. It is strictly true to life that he should receive no more; it proves the author a true artist that he has been able to resist the temptation of giving so attractive a character a happy and unnatural fate, and we who know how the awards of life are proportioned, know that it is entirely in keeping both with art and truth that the *bon chien* should receive no more than the good dog usually gets in recompense for his fidelity. We know that it could not be otherwise; yet we regret the necessity for leaving the good dog with his dry broken crusts.

I regard the extreme interest and attachment with which this character inspires us as one of the greatest triumphs of fiction, because its attraction is stripped of all the adventitious aids to interest which accompany beauty, rank, or position. We have a plain, poor man, in a paltry and invidious situation, who conquers all which is against him as a hero of romance, and arrives at the highest place in the reader's esteem and affection by mere force of natural dignity, excellence of heart, and the irresistible superiority of wit and intellect. He is throughout all his actions, moreover, entirely natural. It is difficult, in reading his

account of them, to believe that he is a fictitious character; all that he does and says is so real, so human. No one who reads *Terre Promise* or *Cœur de Femme* is ever for an instant tempted to think that the characters ever did live or ever could have lived; they are *cartonnages*, lay figures, draped in clothes from the costume maker's, and moving in obedience to the hand of their manipulator. But as Maupassant's Pierre et Jean are living, as Loti's Gaud and Fatougay live, as Rod's Michael Teissier lives, as the delicious Yette lives, so, and with even more vitality than they, the tutor Tristan lives in this admirable novel. And all the people around him live in this country house near Epernay, which is the scene of nearly all his joys and sufferings. We wish, indeed, that this scene never changed; so well does its landscape accord with the narrative, that one wishes the unities could have been preserved to the end. One regrets the change of venue when the story is carried to Paris. It is perhaps probable that the end is not what was originally intended by Cherbuliez.

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It is a story which it is very difficult to end artistically. In point of fact it is not ended at all; it is only broken off at a certain crisis, and leaves the reader in the persuasion that Monique will have many adventures, and her 'bon chien' and her husband many anxieties. The fault in it, if fault there is, seems to me to be that, if this crisis had been contemplated from the beginning, the character of Louis Moufrin, extremely natural as far as it goes, should have been rendered a little more heroic, so that more interest would have attached to his transformation

under the stings of jealousy. If this were not done the *coup de pistolet* should have been given, not by him, but by the preceptor; indeed, since Tristan tells us early in his story that he is a very fine pistol-shot, we are always expecting him to prove his skill on someone, and one could wish that he had exercised it as he desired to do on the odious coxcomb, Triguères. The impression is irresistibly made on the reader's mind that this was the *dénouement* originally contemplated by the author, and it would have been one stronger and more satisfactory. But perhaps he renounced it from the feeling that tragedy as a climax would have jarred on the harmony of a book which is throughout kept to the good-humoured and jesting tone of cultured society.

It would take many pages to do justice to the other persons of the novel; all are admirably drawn; there is only some exaggeration in that of Madame Moufrin, *mère*. But the cheery and generous merchant Brogues, the high-bred, high-born *dévote* who is his wife, the charming priest Verlet, the shy, silent, tender-hearted and timid Moufrin, the inimitable portrait of the learned, excellent and insufferable Sidonie, and lastly, the entirely uncommon conception of the captious and provoking *petite Japonaise*, who rules her faithful two-legged dog with a rod of iron; all these are admirably pourtrayed, even if they yield in importance to the central figure of the preceptor himself. The finest and most complicated study of them all is that of Madame Brogues, with her piety, her sensuality, her instinctive patrician revolt against the monotony of a bourgeois interior, her complex and scornful

nature, her mingled indifference and tenderness for her daughters, the union of touching maternal sadness and devotion to the superior claims of *chiffons*, which traits are so admirably depicted in her last meeting with her younger daughter Monique. *Le Secret du Précepteur*

Cherbuliez has, it is plain to see, been much struck with the large place which *chiffons* occupy in the lives of women of the world, and with the power of consolation which the interests of the toilette possess for them. The mother and daughter are both extremely touched by their accidental meeting (the first since the elopement of the former and the marriage of the latter); but this meeting takes place in the Exhibition building in Paris, and their emotions do not prevent them from studying, discussing, and purchasing beautiful fabrics. It is exactly the union of conflicting feelings which is really to be observed in life: the mingling of deep sentiment and sincere regret with interests of a totally different kind which appear trivial but are really absorbing distractions, perhaps frivolous, but entirely natural, arising from those cares and pleasures of personal appearance which are indestructible in the *élégante* by anything short of death.

There is also another passage which equally illustrates the ability and insight of the author in his perception and representation of that dual motive, that twin yet conflicting sentiment, which so frequently moves us and so especially characterises the modern mind, which is frequently complex and artificial, trivial and analytic, and thereby incapable of a single, or of a simple, emotion. Sidonie, a very proud, chaste, and implacable maiden, is stung to the core by her dis-

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covery of her mother's flight; the thought of what the neighbours and the servants will think is torture to her, and a generous and genuine grief for the blow to her father moves her to the first tears which she has ever shed. But still the idea, the knowledge that since she means never to marry, she is now and will be for ever supreme mistress of her father's house is a source of irresistible pleasure and consolation, and as she goes upstairs she cannot resist, even on this terrible night, exercising her first despotic and unshared power. Her mother, who loved softness and shadow, had always insisted on the electric lamp at the foot of the staircase being shaded and softened by folds of rose-coloured stuff, Sidonie had the rose-coloured stuff taken away, and even on this first evening of her reign the undimmed and intense radiance of the unveiled light proclaims the change of domestic government, and the absolute authority of the new ruler. This is one of the many exquisite finenesses of touch which reveal the delicacy of observation in the writer throughout this novel, and can be only appreciated by a reader who brings to it that attention and capacity which Sir John Lubbock and his audience would think it only worth while to devote to a treatise on the stalk-eyed crustacea or a monograph upon the household flea.

M. Jules Lemaitre, in his story of *Les Rois*, says with a sneer that one of his personages was 'née pour gouter Auber, Cabanel, et les romans de la *Révue des Deux Mondes*.' Now in his own volume, entitled *Les Rois*, published this season, and received with great curiosity in Paris, M. Jules Lemaitre has merely mixed up the tragedy of Meyerling, the mystery of

Johann Orth, and recent well-known card and debt scandals concerning living princes; and, having reproduced with these the individuality of Louise Michel, the life of Kropotkine, and the career of a well-known financier, he has introduced some essays on social and political problems into his reproductions of these personages, dated the whole 1900, and called it a novel. But it is not a novel, for the imagination does not enter into it. It is a photograph, or a travesty, whatever the reader may please to call it, of actual recent modern events, thinly disguised, but unjustly exaggerated, and an almost impudent imitation in many ways of Daudet's *Rois en Exil.* There is some brilliant writing in it, and some fine thoughts and expressions, which is, of course, always the case when the writer is so intelligent a man as Lemaitre, but a novel it is not; it is a series of scenes, almost all borrowed or imitated from well-known events; it is a patchwork with little harmony in its arrangement, and it has the supreme fault of introducing long descriptions of anterior events, and bringing in new characters, at the close of the action. There is also one suggestion, if not more, concerning a royal person, so horrible that it seems unfair and even cruel to make it of one who cannot resent it or defend herself. The date of the story may be called 1900, but the events on which it is built have already been lived through by conspicuous characters.

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It is not becoming, therefore, in so immature a story-teller as M. Lemaitre proves himself to be, and one who is obliged to go for his incidents to the scandals of courts, to sneer at the novels of the *Revue*

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des Deux Mondes, in which, to go no further back than last year, such admirable works as *La Vie Privée de Michael Teissier* and *Le Secret du Précepteur* have first seen the light. To be a critic of it is much easier than to be a creator of fine fiction; to pull to pieces requires lesser qualities than to construct.

In the past twenty months there have been some very fine novels in French literature. *A l'Abîme*, by Paul Vassili, is a masterpiece of originality, and the character of the great egoist, who is its hero, is matchless in its intuition, its philosophy, and its realism; it is a narrative of intense interest without its having any other source for its interest than that which lies in following the evolution of a type wholly new in literature, and the crystallisation of a naturally generous nature into a complete philosophic selfishness through circumstances which lead to its moral isolation amidst the full success of a triumphant career. *Amants* and *La Force des Choses*, of Paul Margueritte, are beautiful novels, remarkable for originality of conception, correctness of observation, and the talent of interesting the reader in perfectly natural events. The former in especial is full of truth, poetic feeling, and novelty of situation and of character; it is entirely a story of love, but it is love pourtrayed with equal sympathy and comprehension, and embracing scenes entirely dramatic whilst entirely natural. If Sir John Lubbock will read these three books and end with *Le Secret du Précepteur*, he will, I think, feel bound to admit that such works require for their due appreciation quite as much attentive respect in their perusal, and quite as many intellectual and perceptive

qualities in their reader, as the analysis, however interesting, of a wasp's social habits, and the diary, however delightful, of a caged bluebottle's appetite. The study of earthworms demands, no doubt, the exercise of much higher faculties than are necessary for the study of human nature. Still it is difficult to believe that the earthworm can afford such varied and complicated interest as man, and nowhere are the portraiture and analysis of man so ably depicted as in a fine novel.[1]

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[1] Since this was written Sir J. Lubbock has been made a peer; and alas! *notre cher Maître*, Cherbuliez, has passed over to the great majority.

V

L'IMPÉRIEUSE BONTÉ.[1]

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A FRENCH critic has ranked the Frères Rosny amongst the 'authors of to-morrow,' and in a certain sense they, no doubt, belong to the class called *les jeunes*, often wrongly, since amongst these *jeunes* there are men of middle age. *Les jeunes* is an expression which is rather intended to indicate new methods and new views than to describe the actual age of the writers. In a sense everyone belongs to *les jeunes* who is emancipated from conventional tradition; but too much stress, too much importance, has been attached to this name; true art is always natural, and this new school is seldom natural; there is more eccentricity of manner in it than there is genuine originality of thought; there is too great an effort, too perpetual a strain in its productions; frequently, as in the case of Maurice Barrès, subtlety of language is employed to conceal absolute poverty of idea; or, as in the case of Georges Ohnet, to clothe mere wooden puppets with a semblance of life by

[1] *L'Impérieuse Bonté*, J. H. Rosny.

skill in depicting incident; or, as in the case of Paul Bourget, to eke out a slender modicum of incident and idiosyncrasy with charm of style and an imposing psychology, and disarm criticism by euphuism. *L'Impérieuse Bonté*

In the two Rosnys there are some of the affectations of these writers, but there is none of their poverty of idea. They are full of ideas; full of meditation, of observation, of sympathy, of experience; the narrow limits to which custom confines the novel are far too small for their abundant powers. In portions of their work there is that more artificial mode of treatment, that strain after recondite words and tortuous and archaic methods of expressions, which are the blemish of *les jeunes*; but in many other portions their true insight, their deep feeling, and their artistic instincts raise them above this pedantry and enable them to produce certain passages which have few equals in any literature. *L'Impérieuse Bonté* is a very long book, but the reader would be dull indeed who did not wish it were longer, and who would not feel that the writers had been forced to renounce many scenes and many reflections and descriptions with which their minds were teeming. They convey to their reader their own attachment to their personages; willingly, we feel sure, they could have filled a hundred volumes with the story of their fate; the fountain of their sympathies is fed by an eternal spring. What is most admirable also in them is their remarkable equity; they can see the injustice done to the rich by the poor, as well as that done to the poor by the rich; and this quality of impartial sympathy is very rare. There is abundance in the world of that one-sided sympathy which springs from a *parti pris*, but

that which is many-sided and perfectly just is very unusual. The Rosnys are capable of it.

The language indeed is at times tortuous, inflated, archaic, after the manner of the modern school; but at other times it loses this mannerism and becomes the clear, limpid, polished French so dear to us. It is never clearer or simpler than in the passages concerning the Lamarques and other sufferers which touch the heart.

The first portion of the book is the finest; the scenes which treat of this family are the greatest as they are the simplest of the whole. Was there ever any passage more pathetic and more real than this description of the last drive in the poor hired vehicle of the dying man and his children?

'Lamarque drew a deep breath under the delicious weight of the freshened air. Strength and peace brushed his tired, sickly frame.

'"Ah! I was sure that this would make me well."

'A smile came around his diaphanous nostrils, his lips parted with childlike pleasure. Albert felt that heaven and earth were born again in endless life. His soul shone through his blue eyes; he began to laugh and jest with nature. But his mother and Georges only saw more plainly in the luminous light the deadly thinness of Lamarque, and could think of nothing except how they should be able to make up for the expense of the five francs for the cab. They had driven out towards a road which looked mysterious and poetic; limes, acacias, young elms, all kinds of shades of green, were lit by a descending

sun. There were flocks of slender trunks; a dainty philosophy of verdure; high above, pale foliage seemed to drink in the light; then depths where the sun-rays seemed to flow and stream like the nebulæ of comets, where they lay like vapour on which some fragile insect life floated like medusæ on the sea. Already dead leaves were on the ground like the tanned flesh, or the brown fur, of forest creatures. Spiders' webs had the colours of the rainbow; in these birdless trees butterflies lent an illusion of winged life and figured the flight of nestlings. Happiness seemed crystallised in the figure of a woman knitting; in the cry of a distant railway train; in the joy of two children munching pears with their crusts; in the sport of a dog who rolled on the grass with a youthful bark and the eyes of one in love with life. The red frock of a young girl passing by lent a note of force, of splendour, of intensity, to the golden afternoon.

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'"It is so nice here!" said Albert.

'Georges, watching the silvery gossamer webs of the spiders, remembered all the visions he had ever had of liberty and space for kind animals and kind people.

'"I am young again!" murmured Lamarque.

'He was still pale, but his pallor was less corpse-like. Even the little François listened and enjoyed with a mute delight—mute because shut within himself—and loved his parents, his brothers, the driver, the trees, and the buzzing flies.

'"Stop," said the sick man suddenly. It was before a high gate, through which was visible a spectacle of Eden, a large garden.

'They could see a great pond, over which there

could float whole broods of delicate dreams; there were tall Lombardy poplars, and the grace of weeping willows. Drooping larches also hung over the water-lilies; there were the thick shade of Canadian poplars, and also the timid murmurs, the sensitive sighs, of aspens. Then there was the charm of woodland life reflected in the water; of the landscape repeated below, symmetrical, and sombre in an abyss of oxidised silver. Then came grassy walks and gentle slopes of turf; further off were clearings in which beautiful trees were half seen, half hidden in misty distance like a promise of abundance and of happiness. The felicity of the place entered into the souls of the poor family who looked on it; they had at once the anguish of feeling that nothing like this would ever be theirs, and the ecstasy of knowing that such beauty did exist.

'Standing up in their sorry hired carriage, they gazed in rapture, saying but few words.

'"One little corner of this garden would be wealth to us!" sighed the mother.

'"That corner—there," said Lamarque.

'"One could not eat one's garden," said Albert.

'Georges, hypnotised, followed with his eyes the flight of an insect. Poised in the sunlight, the creature was motionless awhile; then descended, ascended, then, swift as a sped arrow, vanished in the shadows. One would wish for such an atom, taking so small a place in creation, the joys, the instincts, the intelligence of a great animal. At anyrate, it symbolises all the enjoyments of life, repose on a leaf, movement, ecstasy of travel through space and towards mystery.

'"Ah!" thought Georges, in distress, "even to come and see this, one must have money!" *L'Impérieuse Bonté*

'The hard and heavy thought was like a blow on the tender heart of the boy. Soon this bitterness entered into the souls of all, even of the youngest child.'

What I have translated as 'oxidised silver' is in the original 'blackened nickel,' one of those unfortunate, grotesque, inharmonious expressions of which there are many in this work. To compare water, the liquid, the mobile, the translucent, to any metal is a strange and unfitting comparison. In this passage, which is serious and poetical, the intrusion of such words as 'blackened nickel' seems offensive, and mars all the impression of the phrase. But it is in this kind of offence to the ear and the intelligence that *les jeunes* unhappily revel; they see in such offences signs of emancipation, of realism, of originality, when, in truth, the usage is no sign of anything except of a faulty ear and a lack of judgment.

Throughout the work, however, despite these occasional blemishes, every episode connected with the Lamarques is a masterpiece of pathos and of simplicity, until the last scene of all, when the three children with their mother are about to light the charcoal collected by the little François as it dropped from the waggons when they passed along the quay, and kept in a corner of the miserable room, in readiness for the last hour of all.

The characters of the three boys, so dissimilar and yet united by the vague likeness of race, are drawn with

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a life-like distinctness: Georges, pensive and philosophic, proud, gentle, observant; Albert, sceptic and scornful, with his passionate sense that, since death killed his father through serving others, there can be no God; and the youngest, François, timid, imaginative, devoted, hiding himself under the table, to still the pangs of hunger with fancies of a lonely fairy isle where neither want nor death should come. These three children offer one of the most perfect pictures of innocent and unmerited suffering which literature can offer, and the limner of them and of their sorrows is a fine writer. Jacques Fougeraye, the central figure of the romance, yields his place to them as its chief interest; and is also perhaps inferior in interest to his unhappy and generous patron Dargelle. One would desire to know through what circumstances a man of the talent and character of Fougeraye comes to be destitute in the streets of Paris; something also of the parentage, education, influences which have gone towards making him what he is. In the same way one would wish to know how Lamarque fell into poverty, how his children became so cultured and refined, how the whole family is aloof in every way from their common and odious kindred. *Les jeunes* do not deign to throw light on the antecedents of their *dramatis personæ*; they are wrong, for two reasons: one because they thus baulk the natural and legitimate curiosity of their readers; the second, that there is no true psychology (the word they worship) without study of the causes which have contributed to make a man or woman what the observer of them finds them to be. A writer like Gyp may with airy grace jump, as through a circus-

hoop, into the middle of the lives of her personages without further explanation, but in a philosophic student of human nature in its sad seriousness such saltatory pranks are unbecoming. *L'Impérieuse Bonté*

One could well spare the hundreds of pages devoted to long and, one must say, tiresome descriptions of moral and mental states, for a few pages of lucid and graphic information as to the causes which brought the characters of the book to the pass in which we find them at their first appearance. But this is a method of composition too simple, direct, and natural to commend itself to *les jeunes*. And when on rare occasions they do furnish personal descriptions, these are so wrapped up in anatomical and physiological language that we can conjure up from them little or no real likeness. The characteristic of this new school is an extreme vagueness, an intentional nebulosity. Their personages are never introduced to the reader, nor are they given any pedigree; even personal description of them is of the slightest. They come abruptly on the scene as though they came up through a trap-door. It is left to the intelligence of the reader to supply all the details which the author disdains to furnish. In a book, as in life, one likes to have people duly presented before making their acquaintance; but this is a prejudice which the new school scorns to gratify.

There is a certain tedium in some of the experiences of Fougeraye, such as in his visits to the hospitals and the asylum of misshappen human creatures; and the young woman Louise, a medical student, who has learned to look on death with professional indifference, is so virtuous and self-satisfied that one is indisposed to

share the admiration which Fougeraye feels for her. He himself is so unpretentious, so warm-hearted, so single-minded, and so manly that he deserves a more sympathetic and less vain helpmeet than this female doctor, with her too prosy platitudes and her chill philosophies.

Jeanne Dargelle, whom he rejects, is the least truthful, the most artificial, figure in the book. We are never interested in her. The breath of life has not been breathed into her; and when she kills herself we remain indifferent; we know that in her world women do not kill themselves, and a very proud woman would have found the idea of dying, because her husband's secretary had no love for her, altogether unendurable. We feel also that in real life Fougeraye would probably have shared her passion, and the struggle it would have caused between his temptation, and his loyalty and gratitude to Dargelle, would have been of profound interest. The chapter following on her death, in which Dargelle is alone with her dead body, is very fine, and reflects exactly that strange mixture of emotions and sensations which sway the survivor who passes long hours of solitude beside the corpse of one once dear to him—the trivial incongruities which force themselves in amidst intense regret, the eccentric fancies which dance like marsh-lights over the sombre swamp of a deep despair. Who amongst us has not cried, like Dargelle, 'Pardon, pardon!' from the depths of an aching heart, looking on the dead features of one to whom, in the eyes of the world, we had no fault?

There is in the Rosnys the distressing habit, common

to all the more recent French writers, with few exceptions, of endeavouring to be pedantic, to be involved, to express an idea barbarously and bewilderingly instead of harmoniously and clearly; to say *épiderme* instead of *peau*, *véridique* instead of *vrai*, *prunelles* instead of *yeux*; to use the jargon of science, the abomination of foreign or technical idioms; to turn away from the natural, the direct, the usual, the obvious, and seek an appearance of profundity in what is merely a confusion of sounds. These affectations, these efforts, spoil many of the pages, and weary the most attentive reader in many of the chapters; as does also the incessant tendency to find similes of the most bizarre and eccentric kind, such as the comparison of dead leaves to the fur of animals; of a simile 'frail as the downy blow-ball of dandelion-seed'; of a sky 'of a powdery blue, with the horizon of an aquarium'; of a heart beating 'like a pear oscillating in a breeze,' and many others as far-fetched, as incongruous, and as grotesque. The excessive use of simile, however apt and exact, is always a fault; but similes as absurd and as strained as are most of those employed by the Rosnys, become a deformity of style, annoy the mind, and disagreeably abstract and distract the thoughts.

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A too long, too technical, and too involved description is an inventory which leaves no concrete whole upon the reader's mind; it is a mere conglomeration of items. Take, as an instance, this description of Dargelle's physiognomy; and be it remembered that we never know who or what Dargelle is, how he came by his vast fortune, or anything, indeed, about him, except that he is *un pauvre riche*, a capitalist, one

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supposes, rich by inheritance. Here is the personal description of him :—

'A fat face, sad, meditative; his cheeks fell in; they were flabby. The forehead was a half-circle, with three deep wrinkles, the temples inflamed. The brow was vast but undecided, despite heavy eyebrows above violent eyes. The lips of a wild beast; a short beard which had never grown; flat hair, forming a little patch behind the brow and advancing laterally to the ears. The whole a Finnish face, very pale, with a disposition of the skin to become scaly. The nose long, broad, very irregular, between the snub and the aquiline, the end raised, the bridge bowed. Hardly any back to the head; the neck, like a Celt's, running straight up to the crown. The ears folded backward, stiff, cartilaginous,' etc., etc., etc.

This long and disagreeable description merely conveys the impression of a monster; and it does not in any way agree with the character of Dargelle, magnanimous, tender, generous, and sensitive; suffering acutely from a sense of utter loneliness amidst the parasites who trade on his kind feelings. A man of this temperament would not have violent eyes or wild-beast lips; and the elevation of his sentiments would certainly have given some beauty of expression to his features.

Of Jacques Fougeraye, the hero of the work, we are given no description whatever. On the other hand, the portraiture of the frightful occupant of a

monsters' asylum is traced in fullest and most minute detail, with an ostentation of technical knowledge, in that passion for what is horrible and abnormal which is characteristic of this school. *L'Impérieuse Bonté*

Dargelle, morally, is throughout consistent and lovable, from his first movement of suspicion and distrust, feeling that his new favourite will only use him and cheat him, as all the other dispensers of his charities have done, to the last frank smile with which, though jealous of the happiness he has himself created, he says: 'Allons donc! Je vois bien que vous m'aimez aussi.'

The rich man will only have the crumbs of the bread of the soul which is called love, but his generosity is content with it. '*Le pauvre riche!*' say the Rosnys, with rare insight into the small consolation which, to those in full possession of them, the powers of wealth can give. Dargelle is unique, and it is almost to be regretted that he should occupy but a secondary place in the narrative. The description of his physical malady is perhaps exaggerated; deafness would scarcely cause such violent moral and mental torture; but the pathos of his last appearance is unexaggerated, and goes to the heart of the reader. By his mere word so many people are made happy, and yet, to secure happiness, even relief, for himself his millions are powerless! This is what many a rich and generous man must have felt. The irony of fate is more cruel in a sense to the heirs, than to the disinherited, of fortune. But the pain which the rich suffer is purely sentimental, and there are very few indeed who have nobility of nature enough to feel this at all.

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The rich man has always material comfort, freedom from daily and hourly anxieties; he is at liberty to go wherever he likes, to do whatever he pleases; he enjoys, if he have the true faculty for enjoyment; he can make himself obeyed, if the obedience be but eye-service; he can surround himself with beautiful objects; and he can freely indulge the luxury of generosity, although it is the one luxury of which the rich are not enamoured, the rich man in general never gives except to see his name in print in the newspapers. The compassion of the Rosnys for the rich is scarcely justified, since their greatest burden is *ennui*, and this is an artificial kind of suffering due to defective sympathies, as cold feet are due to sluggish circulation. The statement, put in the mouth of Dargelle, that suicide is much more general amongst the rich than the poor, is certainly not based on fact or on statistics. The rich man, moreover, has one great and most precious exemption: he is free from petty, carking bodily cares; he never knows the greatest agony possible, that of seeing those dear to him hungry and homeless; he can be always warm in cold weather, cool in hot weather; in illness he has every palliative and assistance; his home is his own if he care for it, intangible and immutable; the whole world is his if he possess perception enough to enjoy it; his sufferings may be considerable from dyspepsia and discontent, and, if he be of a high nature, from irritation at the ingratitude and insincerity of human nature, but it is absurd to compare his pains with those of the poor—above all, when the poor are of fine temper, sensitive nerve and cultured intellect

like the Fougeraye and Lamarque of the Rosnys. It is well to remind society that there are sorrows of the soul from which the rich may suffer more acutely than the poor; but it is to exceed this truth to represent the rich as often suffering from this cause. The rich man is usually a complete egotist, whose philanthropy has a political purpose or a social ambition as its mainspring. A Dargelle may exist, does exist; but he is one in ten millions. He is legitimate in his place as a character in romance, but as a character in real life he is met with but very rarely. *L'Impérieuse Bonté*

There are many social questions and many philosophic theories discussed in *L'Impérieuse Bonté*. An unkind critic might say that it is rather a social and philosophic essay than a romance. But in much it conforms to and fulfils the highest demands of fiction, and the naturalness and lovableness of the chief personages lend to it throughout the interest of romance. The mission of Fougeraye in the expenditure of Dargelle's money introduces, perforce, many phases of social misery. It was probably to do this that the book was written; but the harmony and interest of the action of the novel, as a novel, are not sacrificed to this intention. In these chapters all affectation, all artifice drop from the style, and the writers become masters of strong, simple and infinitely touching prose. It is to be regretted that the influence of their time should ever mislead them into tortuous and strained exaggerations and archaisms when it is possible for them to write thus simply and eloquently :—

'The few precious things—the brooch and earrings

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of Madame Lamarque, even her wedding-ring, alas! then the china service, saved with such effort from the fire, with a little rosewood secrétaire, and two Sèvres vases won at a lottery for charity, the gift to it of the Empress Eugénie—all disappeared, all were devoured by the monster Misery. Georges suffered as much as his parents; his nature was inclined towards the adoration of relics, of frail things, of the semi-vitality of objects.

. . . . . .

'It rained a little; in the shadow of the fortifications the lamps trembled under gusts of wind; the reflections touched the wet grass, which seemed for the moment as fresh as the turf of meadows. Everywhere solitude—solitude filled with a sense of near and hidden human life in the closed houses from which came the subdued light of unseen chambers in vague suggestion of mysterious joys. But there was no living creature out of doors except in the openings of the ramparts; on the grass, a dog looking as furtive as a hunting wolf. The boy's eyes gazed at the sky, at the grass, at the long vista of burning lamps, at the grey stony road under his feet. A sense of beauty came into his soul, but a beauty sombre as the psalms of All Saints' Day.

'Beside him his mother carried the mattress which had been sold; he bore one side of it on his shoulder.

'They walk thus, beaten, conquered, the child full of suffocating revolt, the mother humble and resigned, like the meek beasts of the stall, with occasional flickers of wrath soon extinguished. They go thus, saying to each other a few words, muffled and heavy-

hearted, which are the mere dull echoes of their souls. *L'Impérieuse*
"We must turn down that street. How will it end? *Bonté*
—why does not the family help?" At a corner they stop, and suddenly Georges is overwhelmed with pity for his mother, as he sees her profile wet with rain in the light of the street lamp.

'He gazes at her. He remembers, in his earliest childhood, a time when there had been two servants in their house; when his mother had been a gentlewoman, going out for a walk with his father, while the *bonne* pushed the little carriage of the baby François. And here she was, his own mother, with a mattress for sale on her shoulder, on foot in the mud at this time of night. "Mamma! mamma! dear little mamma!" he cried, sobbing, without a single selfish thought, caring only for her, so profoundly, so intensely!'

Again, there is the same intense sympathy in the author with the suffering of the spirit when the two Sèvres vases are taken to their new home, sold for twenty francs, the poor, pretty, familiar things which look so elegant, so slender, so aristocratic amongst the coarse, vulgar ornaments of their new owners, that Georges is proud of their superiority amidst the anguish with which he thinks of them, lost for ever:

'Frail penates, saturated with the soul of home. Ah! how many birthday mornings, how many twilights of study, how many long rainy days and gentle suns of springtime, how many dreams of future voyages in far lands, how many nights fearful with storm or mute with falling snow, had these objects seen!

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They had been always there, fixing themselves inalienably on the retina in their unalterable attitude of delicacy and art: and now they were lost for ever, given over to an alien hand for a coin of gold which would last two days!'

Nothing can be more touching, more sincere, more eloquent than this episode.

Take again the magnificent opening chapter of the fire at which Lamarque contracts the illness which ultimately kills him. It is too long to quote here, but its description is of a force incomparable, and of a truth as great. No one of his contemporaries could have written this chapter; its sobriety and veracity, united to its splendour of diction and its terror of suggestion, make it a *magnum opus*.

It has only one defect; it gives the reader the impression that it cost great effort to the author. It does not convey that sense of the author's spontaneous fertility and joy in creation which Pierre Loti, François Coppée, Anatole France, feel and give. *L'Impérieuse Bonté* is a great work, but its greatness must have cost painful thought and unremitting labour.

One feels that there is nothing of improvisation, of careless and happy inspiration, about it. It is the matured fruit of profound observation, and of complicated doubt, of an unselfish sorrow, and of a noble altruism. It is a work which must impress and elevate all readers who are capable of comprehending its teaching. But there is no laughter in it, nor is there even a smile, save that sad divine smile which accompanies the tears of pity.

VI

WILFRID SCAWEN BLUNT

Wilfrid Scawen Blunt

THERE are few men of our time more interesting than the man who bears this name. Fresh with English air, and dark with desert suns, passionately liberal in thought and nobly independent in opinion, spending his winters on the shores of the Nile, on the edge of the desert, and his summers between the vale of Shoreham, and the alder-shaded water of the humble Mole, he touches, and has always touched, life at its most different facets. Not without knowledge has he written of the green Sussex weald, and of the woodcocks and the thrushes, the oak trees and the yew trees, of 'Evelyn's land'; not without love as though he were also a son of the soil has he written of that other far-off country where—

> 'We may make terms with Nature, and awhile
> Put as it were our souls to grass, and run
> Barefooted and bareheaded in the smile
> Of that long summer which still girds the Nile.'

His private life, likewise, is equally of interest to the most indifferent, since he is the husband of Byron's

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granddaughter, the father-in-law of Neville Lytton, the companion in youth of Owen Meredith, the friend of the Arab, the champion of the dumb, and the standard-bearer of all lost causes. In few personalities is there united so much which is uncommon, and idiosyncrasies which are so varied. He has been so fortunate, oftentimes, in his friends and his fortunes, that it is perhaps only to be human that he should, in his editor who is his friend, fail to be so fortunate as one could wish. Mr Henley, who selected his poems, has excluded many; one is disposed to resent and to rebel; Mr Henley is apt at all times to arouse that sensation in the reader of his somewhat too condescending criticisms.

Many of the verses excluded were political; now it is precisely in politics that Mr Blunt is most delightful to those amongst us who abhor actual governments.

I wish that these poems had come before the public without this species of apology with which Mr Henley heads them. They do not need so uncertain a prefatory note. They are certainly not likely to be popular. They will not be recited over a little tambourine, and used to collect monies for woollen socks and chocolate. They will be little appreciated by the lovers of ballads of blood and fury, and odes of war which scream like a steam-hooter. They are made to be read in quiet places where daffodils blossom, and the black-cap sings; where lake waters lie calm in mountain shadows, or where, through the stillness of a studio or study, a summer breeze blows dropped rose-leaves across the threshold.

Mr Henley raises one standard of great verse: Milton's: and below that nothing to him is great. I

know not where he places Shelley, but does Milton ever touch the heart except perhaps in the Lycidas? Who can care for the exiles of Eden? *Wilfrid Scawen Blunt* very one cares.

I do not think that it was necessary for Mr Henley to say that Mr Blunt is not John Milton. It would not occur to anyone that he was. But then, neither to my thinking is he Byron or Burns, whom Mr Henley thinks that he is, nor is he either Owen Meredith, to whom Mr Henley likewise compares him. He is, to my thinking, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt; alone in his verse as he is also alone (or almost alone) in his opinions and his politics. I dislike comparisons in criticisms. It is a meagre way to define what is, this habit of declaring what it is not; and I love not either the diminution of the living for the exaltation of the dead, or the praise of the living for the depreciation of the dead. Nor is it to me either wit or wisdom to say that Byron 'followed.' Who did he follow? Who was his precursor? Who showed him his matchless double rhymes? Who before him struck the splendid chords of his Juan? Who crowded into a few years of life such accomplishment, such eloquence such romance of existence? Who resembled Byron before Byron lived?

Poets who are not great, and do not aspire to be so, may touch the chords of memory, may unseal the fountains of tears, may make dead loves arise and smile, and the springs of dead years return, and do this with a line, a verse, a suggestion. This is what Owen Meredith did in his song; so does his friend and comrade in his. There is a strongly virile quality in his verse: it is not epicene, nor ever effemi-

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nate; the thoughts are always the thoughts of a man who has felt the hoof of the desert horse cast up the sand of the desert, and seen the circle of the waiting vultures poised in the blue air; and heard 'God's thunder upon Horeb'; who has read his Augustine and Chrysostom on the shores of the Dead Sea, and his Horace and his Herrick lying on the short sheep-cropped grass of Sussex; who knows many a bank whereon the wild thyme grows in lowly Kentish lanes, and has walked with the shades of Dante and of Byron in the marble streets of Ravenna, and under the dying pines of its forest; who has loved and laughed in the artificial passions and mocking mirth of Paris, and has dwelt in the solitudes where the hair tents of the sons of Shem are dark against the east.

Mr Henley, in his somewhat autocratic manner, says that a man lives for posterity in proportion as he figures the gestures and sets forth the emotions of his own time. We can none of us judge what posterity may do or say. I fear it will be too engrossed with itself to take much heed of anything which went before it. Or, possibly, there will be no posterity at all, but only a shattered earth; scattered into space by some exploit of that boastful Icarus called Science. But taking Mr Henley's dictum as it stands, is it true, seeing (as its context shows) that he means an Englishman must be judged by what he writes of England? If this were true, where would go the Juan and the Parisina, the Anactoria and the Atalanta in Calydon, the Cenci and the Adonaïs, the Lucille and the Clytemnestra? Scott would be greater than Shelley, and Cowper than Coleridge. The theory will not hold water.

Which is the greater play of Shakespeare—'King John' or 'The Tempest'? 'Henry the Fifth' or 'Romeo and Juliet'? 'Richard the Third' or 'Hamlet'? *Wilfrid Scawen Blunt*

What are esteemed the greatest epics of the human race—Milton's and Dante's—are located in no known province of our narrow sphere, but, in worlds, heavenly and infernal, whither no traveller has gone, save in the spirit. 'Country' is but a restricted boundary for whoever has the vision which sees beyond the ordinary range of men. To the true poet his native land lies wherever what is beautiful can be beloved, or that which is sorrowful needs solace.

The only thing that personally I regret in these verses is their author's tendency to be too careless in his rhymes. Many of them grate upon one's ear, and such as *sun* and *stone* vex one's sense of melody, indeed, are not rhymes: whilst some words used, such as for instance *Revenue*, accord ill with verse at all. He deems himself quit of obligation to observe these delicacies of metrical beauty, because he says peevishly that he is no poet. But he is a poet; and is so strongly one in feeling that there is no excuse for him not to be more observant of style.

For style is the reed-pipe through which the singer's breath blows music, and he should take heed that his syrinx be well chosen, and well cut, so that each air played on it be clear as the throstle's note.

But rough though many of his compositions are—rough and unstudied—yet, when read in fitting atmosphere, they will be beloved, and in the mind of the reader they will linger like the lilt of a moorland song heard on an autumn eve. There is the *vox*

humana in their melody. They come from the heart of a man who has suffered. They are unequal, extremely unequal; the poet has gone through the woods and gathered together grass and orchis, and gorse, and the sceptered meadow sweet and the bearded barley, all together, just as they happened to come in his path; common things sometimes, or such as seem so to those who do not see the sun shine through and the dew tremble on them.

They are not put together with great care. I should not think that they were turned, and returned, and pondered over, and doubted about. They are too spontaneous, or seem so, to be the subject of great meditation. They are the natural children of a forest-lover. As you read them you receive the irresistible impression that they were written involuntarily as a full heart sighs, as a glad heart sings, but the sigh is more frequent than the song.

He has a great love of rural things. He says :—

'You cannot know,
In your bald cities where no cowslips blow,
How dear life is to us. The tramp of feet
Brushes all other footsteps from the street
And you see nothing of the graves you tread.
With us they are still present, the poor dead.
Being so near the places where they sleep
Who sowed these fields, we in their absence reap.'

Again :—

'This ridge
Is only thirty miles from London Bridge,
And when the wind blows north, the London smoke

Comes down upon us, and the grey crows croak,
For the great city seems to reach about
With its dark arms, and grip them by the throat.
Time may yet prove them right. The wilderness
May be disforested, and Nature's face
Stamped out of beauty by the heel of man
Who has no room for beauty in his plan.'

Again :—

'The dove did lend me wings. I fled away
From the loud world which long had troubled me.
Oh, lightly did I flee when hoyden May
Threw her wild[1] mantle on the hawthorn tree.
I left the dusty highroad, and my way
Was through deep meadows, shut with copses fair,
A choir of thrushes poured its roundelay
From every hedge and every thicket there ;
Mild, moon-faced kine looked on, where in the grass
All heaped I lay, from noon till eve.
And hares unwitting close to me did pass
And still the birds sang . . .'

A certain similarity there is in his verse to Owen Meredith's, but this is due to the fact that they were friends and companions always, in youth and manhood, and that Wilfrid Blunt had an intense and adoring sentiment for his friend which made him regard the other with a feeling which was almost religious in its strength and sincerity.

The following sonnet might have come out of 'The Wanderer,' and I imagine the house called here Palazzo Pagani is the villa in Bellosguardo which

[1] Surely *wild* is a misprint for *white?* A mantle cannot be wild, nor is it an epithet to apply to a hawthorn tree.

Wilfrid Scawen Blunt in 'The Wanderer' shelters the lovers of the 'Eve and May.'

> 'This is the house where twenty years ago
> They spent a spring and summer. This shut gate
> Would lead you to the terrace, and below
> To a rose-garden long since desolate.
> Here they once lived. How often I have sat
> Till it was dusk among the olive trees,
> Waiting to hear their coming horse hoofs graze
> Upon the gravel, till the freshening breeze
> Bore down a sound of voices. Even yet
> A broken echo of their laughter rings
> Through the deserted terraces. And see,
> While I am speaking, from the parapet
> There is a hand put forth, and someone flings
> Her very window open overhead.
> How sweet it is, the scent of rosemary,
> These are the last tears I shall ever shed.'

Here the influence of Owen Meredith is very strong, but it is the influence due to sympathy, not to imitation.

But where he is entirely unlike Owen Meredith is in his passion of pity, which is his dominant instinct, and which in the other is rarely perceptible. Owen Meredith was entirely personal; Wilfrid Blunt is strongly impersonal. The sorrows of man, and of one man in especial, constituted the be all, and end all, of the former; the woes of all creation lie heavy on the soul of the latter. The bird with a broken wing is to Wilfrid Blunt as pitiful a tragedy as the human lover with his ruined joys was to the author of 'The Wanderer'; the chained eagle dying in an iron cage

is to him as cruel a captive as his own soul pining to be free from the limits of sense and the blindness of mortality. He reaches a high level in altruism, which is in him of a very pure kind.

Such pity thrills through these lines on the stricken hart :—

'The stricken hart had fled the brake,
His courage spent for life's dear sake,
He came to die beside the lake.

'The golden trout leaped up to view,
The moorfowl clapped his wings and crew,
The swallow brushed him as she flew.

'He looked upon the glorious sun,
His blood dropped slowly on the stone,
He loved the life so nearly won,

'And then he died. The ravens found
A carcase couched upon the ground,
They said their god had dealt the wound.

'The Eternal Father calmly shook
One page untitled from life's book—
Few words. None ever cared to look.

'Yet woe for life thus idly riven,
He blindly loved what God had given,
And love, some say, has conquered Heaven.'

What Wilfrid Blunt perceives and feels more keenly than greater English poets, more keenly indeed than any English poet except Shelley and Matthew Arnold, are the pathos, the value, the infinite sadness, of these free forest, or desert, lives struck down in the ful-

ness of their strength and beauty by the brutal pursuit of that ravenous and insatiable brute which is Man. It is this emotion which has inspired in him the strange poem named 'Satan Absolved.'

'Satan Absolved' was not written when Mr Henley edited the books of earlier poems, and I imagine that it has scared Mr Henley and displeased him. I do not know this, I have not asked, but I imagine that 'Satan Absolved' must make Mr Henley extremely uncomfortable.

Briefly, the motive of 'Satan Absolved' is the accusation brought by Satan against Man; and against God, as the Creator and Authoriser of Man. This will sound in many ears a profanity; but it is not so, and Satan has sad reason in his arguments. It was a fine and lofty courage which made the author produce it at a moment when the English people are drunk and delirious with the lust of carnage and of conquest, and the great thinker Herbert Spencer has accepted its dedication, whilst the great painter Watts has given it its frontispiece.

It is a poem which will alienate many, affright many, and to many no doubt will appear blasphemous; but it is absolutely true in its hardy and original conception of the sins of mankind against the other races of the earth, and of the hypocrisy, brutality, and avarice of man, clothed and cultured, against man primitive and helpless. It is a *cri de coeur*, breaking almost involuntarily from a heart swollen with indignation, and scorn, and pain, before the emptiness of creeds, the impudence of prayer and praise, the vileness of aggression and of war-lust.

'Hast Thou not heard their chanting? Nay, Thou dost not hear, *Wilfrid Scawen Blunt*
Or Thou hadst loosed Thy hand, like lightning in the clear,
To smite their ribald lips with palsy!'

Like all poems in which Satan is the hero, the Fallen Angel dwarfs Deity. The rebel, not the lord, is in the right. This is inevitable.

Especially it is inevitable here, where Satan is the holder of the scales of justice; the advocate of all those countless races upon earth, who in their birth, and in their death, in their up-rising, and their down-lying, in every day which dawns, and night which falls, curse Man, their merciless master.

'The Earth is a lost force, Man's lazar house of woe
Undone by his lewd will. We may no longer strive,
The evil hath prevailed. There is no soul alive
That shall escape his greed. We spend our days in tears
Mourning the world's lost beauty in the night of years.
All pity is departed. Each once happy thing
That on Thy fair Earth moves how fleet of foot or wing,
How glorious in its strength, how wondrous in design,
How royal in its raiment tinctured opaline,
How rich in joyous life, the inheritor of forms,
All noble, all of worth which had survived the storms,
The chances of decay in the World's living plan,
From the remote fair past when still ignoble Man
On his four foot soles went, and howled thro' the lone hills
In moody bestial wrath, unclassed amongst Earth's ills.
Each one of them is doomed. From the deep Central Seas
To the white Poles, Man ruleth, pitiless Lord of these,
And daily he destroyeth. The great whales he driveth

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Beneath the northern ice, and quarter none he giveth,
Who perish there of wounds in their huge agony.
He presseth the white bear on the white frozen sea
And slaughtereth for his pastime. The wise amorous seal
He flayeth big with young, the walrus cubs that kneel
But cannot turn his rage, alive he mangleth them,
Leaveth in breathing heaps, outrooted branch and stem.
In every land he slayeth. He hath new engines made
Which no life may withstand, nor in the forest shade,
Nor in the sunlit plain, which wound all from afar,
The timorous with the valiant, waging his false war,
Coward, himself unseen. In pity, Lord, look down
On the blank widowed plains which he hath made his own
By right of solitude. Where, Lord God, are they now,
Thy glorious bison herds, Thy ariels white as snow,
Thy antelopes in troops, the zebras of Thy plain?
Behold their whitened bones on the dull track of men.
Thy elephants, Lord, where? For ages Thou did'st build
Their frames' capacity, the hide which was their shield
No thorn might pierce, no sting, no violent tooth assail,
The tusks which were their levers, the lithe trunk their flail.
Thou strengthenedst their deep brain. Thou madest them wise to know,
And wiser to ignore, advised, deliberate, slow,
Conscious of power supreme in right. The manifest token
Of Thy high will on earth, Thy natural peace unbroken,
Unbreakable by fear. For ages did they move
Thus, kings of Thy deep forest swayed by only love.
Where are they now, Lord God? A fugitive spent few
Used as Man's living targets by the ignoble crew
Who boast their coward skill to plant the balls that fly,
Thy work of all time spoiled, their only use to die
That these sad clowns may laugh. Nay, Lord, we weep for Thee,

And spend ourselves in tears for Thy marred majesty.
Behold, Lord, what we bring,—this last proof in our hands,
'Their latest fiendliest spoil from Thy fair tropic-lands,
The birds of all the Earth, unwinged to deck the heads
Of their unseemly women : plumage of such reds
As not the sunset teach, such purples as no throne,
Not even in heaven showeth, hardly, Lord, Thine own ;
Such azures as the sea's, such greens as are in spring
The oak trees' tenderest buds of watched-for blossoming,
Such opalescent pearls as only in Thy skies
The lunar bow revealeth to night's sleep-tired eyes.
Behold them, Lord of Beauty, Lord of Reverence,
Lord of Compassion, Thou who metest means to ends,
Nor madest Thy world fair for less than Thine own fame,
Behold Thy birds of joy, lost, tortured, put to shame,
For these vile strumpets' whim. Arise, or cease to be
Judge of the quick and dead! These dead wings cry to Thee,
Arise, Lord, and avenge !'

The use of the six-foot Alexandrine couplet may seem to many readers as a thing unknown and unwelcome in English verse. Others may say that here and there the language has not been sufficiently carefully weighed, that there is repetition of thought in some places, and of words in others, as for instance the word 'plain' recurs three times in seven lines. But when hypercriticism has said and done its worst, the work remains a just and generous indictment; heroic in its courage and vigorous in its eloquence, pleading the cause of those who cannot plead their own. The human race will be ill-pleased by the denunciation; for their vanity must be wounded by one who incessantly reminds it of its kinship to 'the lewd, bare-

buttocked ape,' and who calls it full rightly, 'sad creature without shame,' and calls also :—

'A presence saturnine,
In stealth among the rest, equipped as none of these
With Thy mind's attributes, low crouched beneath the trees,
Betraying all and each.
. . . . . .
'The red Japhetic stock of the bare plains, which rolled
A base-born horde on Rome erewhile in lust of gold,
Tide following tide, the Goth, Gaul, Vandal, Lombard, Hun,
Spewed forth from the white North, to new dominion
In the fair Southern lands, with famine at their heel
And rapine in their van, armed to the lips with steel.
. . . . . .
'The master-wolf of all men call the Sassenach,
The Anglo-Norman dog who goeth by land and sea,
As his forefathers went in chartered piracy,
Death, fire, in his right hand.'

Again, who, in the vain-glorious Britain of our time, will pardon this?—

'The head knaves of the horde,
Those who inspire the rest and give the master word,
The leaders of their thought, their lords political,
Sages, kings, poets, priests, in their hearts one and all,
For all their faith avowed and their lip service done
In face of Thy high fires each day beneath the sun,
Ay, and their prelates too, their men of godliest worth,
Believe no word of Thee as master of their Earth,
Controllers of their acts, no word of Thy high right
To bend men to obedience, and at need to smite,
No word of Thy true law, the enforcement of Thy peace,
Thy all-deciding arm in the world's policies,

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They ignore Thee on the earth. They grant Thee, as their "God,"
The kingdom of the heavens, seeing it a realm untrod,
Untreadable, by man, a space, a *res nullius*,
Or No Man's Land which they, as loyal men and pious,
Leave and assign to Thee to deal with as Thou wilt,
To hold as Thy strong throne or loose as water spilt,
For sun and wind to gather in the wastes of air.
Whether of a Truth thou *art*, they know not, Lord, nor care;
Only they name Thee "God," and pay Thee their prayers vain,
As dormant over-lord and pensioned suzerain,
The mediatised blind monarch of a world, outgrown
Of its faith's swaddling clothes, which wills to walk alone.'

These lines must be bitter in the teeth of the men of his generation, of the men who say openly that religion is for the seventh day, not for the week of work and war; who, churchgoers and chapelgoers alike, uphold the campaign of blood and plunder; who prate of Helots, and treat the Kaffir worse than any Helot that ever lived; who seek warrant in their Scriptures for endless slaughter, and for endless slavery, of all in any manner weaker than themselves; and who, with their jargon of civilisation, and their doggerel of cant, bear fire and pestilence over all the globe.

Doubtless to man, convinced in deformity of his own beauty, in disease of his own health, in crime of his own virtue, in blood-lust of his own religious aims, the portrait of Man as given here in Satan's scathing words will be very offensive. All honour be to the man who has dared to draw it!

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It might be perhaps easy to show the fallacy of this upbraiding, and prove the facts of the maintenance of life by the destruction of life which has always prevailed on earth; the facts that the python and the cobra, if not the tiger, and the eagle, slays, as man slays, for sport in addition to food; that in the depths of the unfathomed seas, and in the azure space of highest air, and in the green twilight of virgin forests, the god of cruelty reigns and prevails; that the elephant and the rhinoceros wrestled and the keen cheetah sprang on the meek cameleopard, and the jaws of the crocodile opened for the playful gazelle before ever the steel and the lead of the human brute touched and slew them. But when this has been said and admitted, it does not invalidate the truth of Satan's charge; that man has laid waste the earth and slaughtered for greed, for savage pleasure, for mere wantonness, as never any other creature before him or beside him on this planet, has done or has ever wished to do.

To blast the harmless, gentle, colossal whale with the coward's tool of dynamite; to strip the fur coat off the living seal and drive her tender body over sharp rocks it was never made to cross; to castrate the lion and tear his flesh with red-hot irons that he may make the sport of fools; to rear the timid pheasant by millions, hand fed and unsuspecting, only that they may fall under the breechloaders of princes and lords and gentlemen; to penetrate into virgin forests and plunge in untroubled streams to seize the heron on her nest, and poison the lyre-bird in his haunts, and snatch his golden plumes from the bird of paradise, and his rosy wings from the flamingo, that commerce may flourish

and women be adorned—all these things, and more like them, crimes of every clime and every hour, are human sins, and human sins alone; and justify in its strongest accusations the charge of Satan against Man as the most brutal murderer on earth; the same creature of destruction still, in the comedy which he calls civilisation, as when in his cave and his lake dwellings he first sharpened a stone, and then stole out to kill.

And it is herein there lie alike the courage and the value of the 'Satan Absolved.' It is by no means a perfect poem; it would have been well if it had received much more meditation and amplification, if passages which approach the grotesque like the 'old world furniture,' the 'linen long in press' of Heaven in the first page had been altered; and the destiny and mission of Satan at the close are enwrapped in a mystery which is to me at least incomprehensible; but when the utmost has been said against it which can be urged, the poem remains a noble effort to proclaim a supreme truth, which, as all great truths have done, dawns slowly on the human mind—the solidarity of life.

The preface alone to the book should make everyone obtain and cherish it. This time the writer has penned his own presentation, and is not ushered in by Mr Henley. It is enough to say that the introduction, like the work, is worthy of the Englishman who, amidst a deafening roar of national vanity and triumph, dared to denounce the injustice and the inhumanity of Omdurman.

It must not be forgotten that this poet is also a writer of prose; prose clear, terse and strong. His letters to the leading journal of London, and his

Wilfrid Scawen Blunt works on the present state of India and the future state of Islam are virile in thought and fearless in expression. A Sussex landowner, and the possessor of a fortune sufficient to give him entire independence, he has been the nominee of no party and the slave of no prejudice. His temper is essentially *frondeur*; he has, what so few possess, absolute independence of judgment; he refuses to see through other men's spectacles, whether of smoked or of rose-coloured glass. Again and again has he had the courage to oppose the policy of ministers who were his personal friends. He opposed Mr Gladstone's and Lord Granville's policy in Egypt, considering it alike unjust and unwise; and he appealed alike to Parliament and to the nation against it, uselessly but not the less manfully. The eloquence which he used so nobly at that time must remain in the memories of many. He equally opposed the recent campaign in the Soudan of Lord Salisbury's Cabinet, and the brutal carnage commanded and excused by Kitchener. In India he was, at an interval of a few years, the guest of two Viceroys, yet he never for a moment consented to accept the views of either, although for both he had strong personal friendship and regard. He thought (and thinks) the whole system of English administration in India a cruel, costly and most perilous mistake.

'I believe,' he says, 'the natives capable of governing themselves much better than we can do, and at about a tenth part of the expense.

'I have found a vast economic disturbance, caused partly by the selfish commercial policy of the English

Government, partly by the no less selfish expenditure of the English official class. I have found the Indian peasantry poor, in some districts, to starvation; deeply in debt, and without the means of improving their position; the wealth accumulated in a few great cities and in a few rich hands, the public revenues spent to a large extent abroad, and by an absentee Government. I have been unable to convince myself that India is not a poorer country, now, than it was a hundred years ago, when we first began to manage its finances. I believe, in common with all native economists, that its modern system of finance is unsound, that far too large a revenue is raised from the land, and that this is only maintained at its present high figure by drawing on what may be called the capital of the country, namely, the material welfare of the agricultural class; probably, too, the productive power of the soil. I find a large public debt and foresee further financial difficulties.

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'Again, I find the ancient organisation of society broken up, the interdependence of class upon class disturbed, the simple customary law of the East replaced by a complicated jurisprudence imported from the West, increased powers given to the recovery of debt, and consequently increased facilities of litigation and usury. Also, great centralisation of power in the hands of officers daily more and more automatons and less and less interested in the special districts they administer. In a word, new machinery replacing, on many points disadvantageously, the old. I do not say that all these things are unprofitable, but they are not natural to the country and are costly and out of

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all proportion to the good. India has appeared to me in the light of a large estate which has been experimented on by a series of Scotch bailiffs who have all gone away rich.'

In another place he says with equal frankness:—

'India seems to me just as ill-governed as the rest of Asia. There is just the same heavy taxation, government by foreign officials, and waste of money that one sees in Turkey. The result is the same; and I don't see much difference between making the starving Hindoo pay for a cathedral at Calcutta and taxing Bulgarians for a palace on the Bosphorus. Want cuts up all these great empires in their centralised governments.'

'The "natives" as they call them,' he writes farther on, 'are a race of slaves, frightened, unhappy, and terribly thin. I own to being shocked at the Egyptian bondage in which they are held, and my faith in British institutions has received a severe blow. . . . I never could see the moral obligations Governments acknowledge of taxing people for debts which the Governments, and not the people, have incurred. All public debts, even in a self-governing country, are more or less dishonest, but in a despotism like India they are a swindle.' 'It is my distinct impression,' he states in another portion of his too brief work, 'from all that I have seen and heard, that the ill-feeling now existing in India between the English there and the indigenous races is one which, if it be not allayed by a more generous treatment, will in a few years make

the continued connection between England and India altogether impossible, and that a final rupture of friendly relations will ensue between the two countries, which will be an incalculable misfortune for both, and may possibly be marked by scenes of violence such as nothing in the past history of either will have equalled. The people are beginning to awake and to resent the stupidity of those who, representing England in India, wantonly affront them, and unless the English public at home, with whom as yet the Indian races have no quarrel, becomes awake, too, to the danger of its own indifference, the irreparable result of a general race hatred will follow. Only it should be remembered that India is a vast continent peopled by races ten times more numerous than ourselves, and then the convulsion, when it comes, will be on a scale altogether out of proportion to our experience, and so the more alarming. Let India once be united in a common sentiment of hatred for all that is English and our rule there will *ipso facto* cease. Let it once finally despair of English justice, and English force will be powerless to hold it in subjection. The huge mammal, India's symbol, is a docile beast and may be ridden by a child. He is sensible, docile and easily attached. But ill-treatment he will not bear forever, and when he is angered in earnest his vast bulk alone makes him dangerous, and puts it beyond the strength of the strongest to guide him.'

Wilfrid Scawen Blunt

All who are interested in the future of England and India should read this volume, which, although written as far back as Lord Ripon's viceroyalty, applies in all

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its lessons and all its warnings with ten times greater force to the India of to-day, which, with the three-fold curse upon it of famine, of drought, and of plague, finds the British Government too engrossed in its aggressive and criminal war in South Africa to come to the relief of its Indian Empire, where tens of thousands of human lives, and millions of animals, are wasting in death and in despair.

VII

JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

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SEVERAL years ago, at the moment when Mr Chamberlain, having abandoned the Liberal Party, was adored by the party which calls itself Conservative, I looked at him one evening after a dinner in a well-known house in Belgrave Square. He was standing, surrounded by the loveliest and most fashionable women of society, who were offering him a homage which must have been delightful to him. It was an interesting, if rather comical, spectacle, and I imagine that Chamberlain, though he gave no sign of doing so, enjoyed it extremely, and laughed at it in his sleeve. His physiognomy indicates his character; it has no distinction, but it is full of energy, intelligence, and resolution; it is the physiognomy of a tradesman, not of a statesman, of a person extremely keen and acute, obstinate and cruel, but not by any means intellectual. The eternal eyeglass serves to hide such expression as his features might have, and the nose, short and *rétroussé*, makes plebeian lineaments which might without this defect be sufficiently regular. In these later times he has aged more than his years perhaps

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justify, and it is said that he suffers from neuralgia and gout. He is always well dressed; 'too well' an ex-Viceroy murmured to me that evening; and he is never seen, as everyone knows, without an orchid in his button-hole; a flower always culled in one of those famous orchid-houses at Highbury, which, before his conversion, the Tory ladies longed so passionately to burn down, in days when he was considered odious, accursed, almost an Antichrist!—days not so very distant as the life of a nation counts.

It was always said, at the time of his apostasy, that he left the Radicals out of jealousy of Gladstone's greater powers, and of the magnetism which Gladstone exercised over all his colleagues; and also because amongst the Liberals there was Lord Rosebery, then in the fulness of promise; there was Vernon Harcourt, then extremely eloquent and much followed; and there was also in the Home Rule Party that great genius, known amongst men as Charles Stewart Parnell, in whom Chamberlain felt an irresistible superiority. If this were the reason, he must now be content, since in his present party he has no rival in the Cabinet, no one ventures to contradict him, and he is *de facto*, though not yet *de jure*, the head of the present Government. There have been many men of distinction before him in the somewhat subordinate post of Secretary of the Colonies, notably the late Lord Carnarvon, and the first Lord Lytton; but no one has ever made of this Department the throne of the Suprema Lex as Mr Chamberlain has contrived to do. The fault of whom, or the fault of what, lies

at the root of this successful usurpation? Let us endeavour to discover, for the problem is interesting; and one of its most strange phenomena is to see Robert Cecil, Marquis of Salisbury, fallen under the dominion of the Birmingham screw-maker.

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In the whole of the Tory Party, Chamberlain has no one who opposes him, no one who approaches him for strength of character and for acuteness of perception, one may also add for unscrupulousness in principle and in action. The sole person of the party who could have imposed authority upon him by superiority of intellect would have been Lord Salisbury; but either through force of energy on his own part, or by lack of energy on his chief's, he has been able completely to rule and influence the master of Hatfield, as he has succeeded in ruling and influencing all others who sit round the ministerial table in Downing Street. A friend of mine speaking once to me of Lord Salisbury, whom he knew intimately, sa d, 'He is a fine big cannon, but he won't go off; I doubt if he will ever go off.' It is probable that Chamberlain had the same opinion, and therefore resolved himself to manœuvre and fire the cannon. Anyhow, he has acted well for himself in leaving the Radicals to ally himself with their adversaries. If posterity blame him, and call him a turncoat, I imagine that he is a man to whom the verdict of posterity is absolutely indifferent. He is as 'hard as nails,' to use an appropriate if common phrase; he is cynical and selfish; and to a politician of this stamp, reputation in history is a matter of extreme indifference; fame must seem to him only a carnival-masquer, noisily blowing a tin trumpet.

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Napoleon, after the campaign of Egypt, said once, 'If I die to-morrow I shall only have half a page in a universal dictionary.' To Chamberlain, I believe, it would be wholly indifferent to have the half page, or even a whole page. What suffices to him is to dominate and lead other men while he lives. He is called inordinately ambitious, but his ambition is essentially practical, not ideal. He wishes for the loaves and fishes; a laurel crown would be to him a useless thing, unless it represented to him solid lucre. Would he have succeeded if he had been born half a century earlier? I doubt it. In the first half of the past century, men admired in the ministers who ruled them very different qualities to those which he possesses. On the other hand, his qualities are precisely those which beget and command fortune in the actual moment; and by this I intend no compliment either to him or to his times.

In an epoch more courageous, more honest, more well-bred than the present, a great Party calling itself Conservative would have repulsed with contempt any renegade Radical, however disguised in the domino of a Unionist. Instead, this Party has received him with open arms, nay, with prostrate self-effacement, and worshipped him with enthusiasm; indeed, the victory of the so-called Tories at the urns in 1895 would not have been possible if Chamberlain had not permitted it; which he would not have done unless he had been assured that he would enter and dominate the Salisbury Cabinet. He has been equally happy in the occasions which have presented themselves to him, and in his own capability in using them; in the mediocrity of the men who combine with him,

and of the men who oppose him; in his infinite ability in influencing the first, and in intimidating the last; he has been fortunate also in the fact that the English people are less bigoted in religion than of old; for in an earlier time they would have seen with horror a Unitarian entering the Government. But his greatest good fortune of all was in the rise of the Home Rule question at the very moment when he conceived the project of going over to the Tory camp, which, without such an opportune reason to give for it, would have appeared mere unworthy treachery. Without the platform of Home Rule from which to make his *saut périlleux*, the leap would have probably broken his neck; at anyrate he could not have made it with the certainty of being welcomed and rewarded by his new allies, and of occupying amongst them a position far more conspicuous than he ever occupied with the Radicals.

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His favouring star has also given him the marvellous good luck that in the past year the death of Lord Salisbury's consort has so depressed and preoccupied the Premier that the latter has almost entirely ceased to occupy himself with the cares of office, and the Colonial Secretary has been given more and more completely, with every month, a free hand.

To me it has always seemed, during these later months of 1899, and since, that the Sovereign should have bidden Lord Salisbury either dismiss Chamberlain from office, or surrender office himself; for since Chamberlain was allowed virtually to hold the helm of the State, he

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should have been forced to accept the responsibility of the State's navigation.

Chamberlain has frequently declared that he has not changed in anything; that he has not been an opportunist; that the Tory Party has come to him, and has granted all his desires, accepted all his policy: and in this statement of his there is some truth, if not an entire truth. As two negatives make an affirmative, perhaps two desertions make a fidelity! It is certain that the Tory Party has forsaken its old paths quite as much as Chamberlain has his, indeed probably far more, for there is no conservatism whatsoever in the acts of the so-called Conservative Cabinets, and in his there is a great deal of radicalism still, even of socialism, though this is oddly united to a hybrid and artificial toryism.

An eminent Conservative, a member of the Upper House, assured me the other day that he honestly believed that Chamberlain had never done anything which would prevent him at any time from being able, honourably, to become the leader of the Radical Party. If this be admitted, what are we to think of the Tory Party which can find no other guide and saviour than this consistent Radical? Either the consistent Radical, or the inconsistent Conservative Party, has 'ratted' in the most barefaced manner. One or the other has been false to primal faith; and there is only a very small band of independent thinkers who venture to declare this. For Chamberlain has had the supreme cleverness to get himself taken by the public as a patriot, and to oppose him, therefore, lays open his opponent to a charge of want of

patriotism. This is extremely absurd; but it is to him enormously useful; and he knows that the nation which he 'personally conducts' is not logical or critical. He has taken its measure very accurately. *Joseph Chamberlain*

The new hysterical creed of 'Imperialism' doubtless gained an impetus, Home Rule equally certainly lost, by the change of front of 'Birmingham Joe.' But the aristocratic party was harnessed like a cab-horse to the triumphal car of the New Unionist, and has ever since then remained thus harnessed. In the history of English politics these passages will contribute a chapter which will not edify the readers of the next generation; especially if its climax be, as it will be almost certainly, the apotheosis of Chamberlain after a campaign of aggression and conquest conceived and carried out by him and the Yellow Press which he inspires. It is he who is responsible for the financiers' war in South Africa; he might call it proudly, '*my war*,' as the Empress Eugénie called the war with Germany, '*ma guerre à moi*.' If he had never been anything higher than Mayor of Birmingham the farmers of the Transvaal would still be ploughing their lands in peace.

The war was desired, conceived, and imposed on his colleagues by the Minister of the Colonies, without any appeal to or sanction of Parliament. He denies this, but it is clearly proved by his famous speech at Highbury and by the text of his irritating and provocative despatches; and it was only when that war was begun, beyond all possibility of alteration, that the Prime Minister, after long silence, accepted the responsibility of

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it in his speech at the Guildhall. Lord Salisbury, in that Mansion House speech, of course, denied the allegation then made by the President of the French Chamber of Commerce as to the motives and causes of the war; but no one who has attentively followed the actions and expressions of Chamberlain before and after the Jameson Raid, and his conduct at the enquiry held upon the conduct therein of Cecil Rhodes, can for a moment doubt the intimate relations which united the Colonial Secretary and the founder of Rhodesia and the Chartered.

Chamberlain, who, at the close of the Committee of Enquiry of 1897, had, in common with other signatories, signed a statement that Rhodes was culpable, declared a few days later in the House of Commons that Rhodes was a man whose honour was untarnished! This, more than any other fact, shows to what depths it is now possible to descend in English politics. Certainly, in the time of Peel or of the earlier Governments of Gladstone, a Minister capable of such conduct would have lost alike office and seat in Parliament. Chamberlain, living in times of more elastic morality, did not lose even a single follower.

'Joseph Chamberlain has brought into English politics the habits and criterions of a commercial traveller,' an eminent Englishman wrote to me the other day. 'And of a commercial traveller not burdened by scruples.' Now, the man of trade may have considerable qualities, great intelligence, and great enterprise, but his mind and his acts are those of a tradesman, not those of a gentleman, or of a statesman. Chamberlain boasted in public one day that he belonged to the Party

of Gentlemen; now no gentleman would ever have so expressed himself.

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The tradesman inevitably brings into public life the traditions of his counting-house; those traditions are to try, invariably, *de rouler les autres*. Now public life should be something more than, and very different to, the pursuit of speculation; and its aims should be higher than the mere desire to trick a rival and send shares up or down. True, statecraft in our day is chiefly 'land-grabbing' and an effort to bridle democracy by taxation. Still it is a different art to the art of the merchant's or manufacturer's office. When Chamberlain endeavours to be diplomatic he becomes inane: a person (who must have been very *naïf*) wrote to him the other day to ask if it were true that it had always been his wish and intention to make war on the Boers, he replied to this simpleton of a correspondent, 'I fear there will always be those who will attribute to me the worst motives. Tennyson has said that every man attributes to another the motives which would actuate himself' —and that was all! I imagine he thought this reply very ingenious and tactful.

He is no doubt adroit and ingenious in his management of men; but his cunning does not wear the smiling and elegant mask which a politician's should do. He does not possess the talent most necessary of all to a politician, of taking refuge in exquisitely-turned phrases which seem to reveal everything and reveal nothing. His voice is flexible and fine, his deliverance imposes, but his statements are frequently impudently cynical, and it is easy to

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discern that he holds men very cheap, and in no way hesitates to use, to abuse, and to deceive them. He is never really frank in his replies, though he affects candour; he often approaches brutality; he loses his temper easily; and the spectator sees by the nerves of his face and the movements of his limbs that he has not the self-control and *sang-froid*, which are natural gifts of the man of race and breeding. But despite these defects and these offences he has conquered both society and his colleagues, and one sees scholarly and refined men like Mr Arthur Balfour hopelessly and helplessly hypnotised by him. He has taken with him into Downing Street the manners and the methods with which he governed the town councillors of Birmingham; and these succeed equally well in his altered atmosphere. 'We are all horribly afraid of him,' one of his colleagues said the other day to a friend of mine; probably because he is the only man amongst them ill-bred and ill-tempered enough to be disagreeable and dangerous. In earlier days, in those of Derby, of Palmerston, of Melbourne, Westminster would not have tolerated him for a single session; in times when orators quoting Greek or Latin verse were sure to be understood by either House, when classical allusions were caught flying, when accuracy and consistency were esteemed necessary in debate, the speeches of the present Colonial Secretary would not have been thought tolerable.

But the Great Britain of Lord Grey, of Canning, of Sydney Herbert, of the Rupert of Debate, of the first half of Gladstone's political life is dead and gone; and Disraeli has passed over its grave,

of which he was the digger. Disraeli and his influence have dominated and penetrated English political and social atmospheres, in their highest strata, as a contagious fever enters and reigns in a district. It was a strange phenomenon, the Venetian Jew leading by the leash the entire English aristocracies. To trace the manifold reasons which enabled a man so alien and antipathetic to the British nation in blood, in manner, in appearance, in opinions, to dominate that nation so completely would require many folio volumes; for there has never been anything more singular, or more due to innumerable causes, all converging to one end.

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No spectacle is more extraordinary than the power which Disraeli acquired after being laughed down by everyone; acquired, and wields still, so many years after his death. I think that his most potent philtre lay in his flattery. He flattered his Sovereign, his party, and the nation itself, with all the florid eloquence and subtle suggestion of which he was so admirable a master. His famous 'Peace with Honour' was an exact sample of his style; the peace was brittle and the honour was dubious, but his manner of presenting them was so magnificent that they were received as though they were gifts from heaven. An able writer has said that the English are deficient in the power of observation, and I believe it is true. They do not examine critically before committing themselves to embrace a cause or an idea; they can easily be led into any extravagance which humours their national humour. Disraeli played on this weakness. He had himself a passion for advertise-

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ment, for varnish and gilding, and florid decoration; all his speeches and all his romances are spoilt by these; and he succeeded in inoculating with this taste the English character to which it was naturally alien.

The first sign of the nation having been so inoculated was given when it allowed Disraeli to call the Queen of England the Empress of India, and change an ancient monarchy into a *parvenu* empire. The first step taken, the rest followed; the mania of what is considered aggrandisement has acquired possession of the national life, and has made of a nation, naturally noble and great, a swollen boaster, bawling of its millions, its might, and its superiority, although surely vanity is no more admirable in a country than in an individual? This alteration in the British temper, which was primarily the work of Disraeli and of the new nobility (chiefly commercial and largely Jewish), which was called into being, prepared the ground for Chamberlain's Imperialism, a much coarser and greedier thing, without any of the veil of ideality which Disraeli lent to his creeds. In the time of Disraeli, the temper of England was still largely coloured by an old aristocracy, retaining, with the prejudices, the principles of gentlemen; now, the financiers and the speculators make the old aristocracy dance to whatever music they choose, and riches are the sole thing sought.

Every Ministry in England, on going out of office, leaves its contingent of ennobled tradesmen, raised to the peerage solely for their money, and for the way in which they have spent their money for the Party. In

this way the so-called Conservative leaders possess a solid phalanx of supporters whose wealth makes them irresistible in the country, and who practically send up to Westminster any men they choose. These great *richards* find Joseph Chamberlain more to their taste than Lord Salisbury, who is too scholarly, too satirical, and too great a gentleman for them; his health is failing, he speaks rarely, there is a cynical contempt in his occasional speeches which cuts the *novi homines* like a whip. It is impossible that a man of Lord Salisbury's pride of character and acuteness of intellect should much longer consent to be the mere echo of his Colonial Secretary. There is every sign that his retirement will be followed by the accession to the premiership of Chamberlain. For months past the Imperialist Press, and notably that journal which is the property of the Chancellor of the Primrose League, has been insinuating that no one except Chamberlain is capable of rising to the height required by advanced Imperialism: and what this journal says is certain to be echoed by that party, which, with an audacity almost sublime, still calls itself Conservative.

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Chamberlain has continued the work of Disraeli, but he has done so by vulgarising and brutalising it. The best qualities of the English character are, under his influence, lost in a blatant self-admiration. Its sense of morality is blunted; its leaders accept any denial or excuse of the Minister of the Colonies, and he is applauded when, as an independent Member said a few weeks since in the House of Commons, he should be called to the bar of the House. Parlia-

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ment, and the nation after it, accept the suppression of despatches and telegrams, the use and abuse of censorship, the denial and interruption of free speech, the closure of debate at the moment when its continuance would be inconvenient to ministers: all things previously intolerable to the English people. Chamberlain has educated them into the abandonment of all their ancient virtues. If, as he is almost certain to do if he live, he become before long the Premier of England, he will do immeasurable harm both to Great Britain and the world.

The reign of Queen Victoria has been a long succession of wars; few, if any, were either necessary or inevitable. But not one of these has been a war of defence at home; the English citizen and peasant know nothing in their own land of the horrors of war; they have never seen its desolation and its horrors; they have never seen their little children crushed under the hoofs and wheels of a battery, their homes set on fire by a shell, their sons starving, their fields devastated, their towns beleaguered. They have never seen a battle, a siege, a trench full of dead; therefore they do not know the hideous suffering which they inflict when they let loose, in pride of spirit and lightness of heart and triumphant vanity, the fiends of war upon a distant people and a far-off land. This is the excuse of a large portion of the nation for the present war; but it is at the same time the strongest condemnation of those who preach war to it as a divine creed, and appeal to its most brutal instincts, and abuse its ignorance to lead it into crime. The victories now gained will be dearly

bought, for they, and the national madness they produce, will certainly set Joseph Chamberlain in the seat of supreme power, and no one will have the courage to restrain his hand. Bellona has served him so well now, she will be his chosen handmaid in the future.[1] *Joseph Chamberlain*

[1] It is possible, though little to be hoped, that the complications in China (which any far-sighted statesman would have foreseen and provided for) may open the eyes of the British people to the terribly heavy bill which they will pay, eventually, for the luxury of the Chamberlain Cabinet.

VIII

UNWRITTEN LITERARY LAWS

Unwritten Literary Laws

THERE has been some idea mooted of forming an Academy in England on the lines of the Academy of France, but it would never be the same kind of institution, or exercise the same authority. The English temper is not academic, the Royal Academy is proof enough of that. Moreover, Englishmen are indifferent to the use or abuse of their language, and the first care of an Academy must be to keep the national language pure, and clear, and elegant. The well of English undefiled is sadly muddy, nowadays, and any roaring screamer of English or American slang is as welcome to those who call themselves critics as though he wrote like Matthew Arnold or John Morley. Lacking an Academy of Letters, and the writers who would make one, there is in London what is called a Society of Authors, which is supposed to resemble the Société des Gens de Lettres in Paris, but the English Society appears to be chiefly an association for the multiplication and publication of inferior works, and its authority on literature is *nil*. In addition to these, there are persons who call them-

selves literary agents; but the latter have a decidedly anti-intellectual influence, and to them is probably, in part, due the enormous increase in the issue of rubbish of all kinds, which is at the present time doing so much injury to the English literary reputation. *Unwritten Literary Laws*

The number of volumes which pour annually from the English press is, at the present hour, appalling. One house alone produces, in number, enough volumes for the whole trade. Why are these volumes, usually worthless, ever produced? Why do the circulating libraries accept them? Who reads them? Who buys them? Why does one see in the lists of London 'remainders' the announcement of volumes originally published at six, eight, ten, twelve shillings, to be sold second-hand, perfectly new and uncut, at the miserable prices of two shillings, eighteen-pence, one shilling, and even sixpence. Amongst these is sometimes a work of real and scholarly worth, which it is painful to see thus sacrificed, but rarely; for it is rarely that such a work is now issued in London. Where is this to end? With whom does the fault of it lie? Someone, I suppose, must gain by such an insane method of over-production, but I cannot see who it can possibly be. One well-known publisher tells me that he must issue books thus, or starve. He is not in danger of bodily starvation, but the public is mentally starved by such a system.

When the three-volume novel was abolished (a course which I urged long before it was taken) great things were expected by many from its abolition. I myself hoped that London would adopt the Paris

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method, and issue novels and all other works, except *éditions de luxe*, at small prices and in paper covers; not the gaudy, hideous, pictorial, paper cover, but the pale smooth grey or cream-coloured paper, so easily obtainable, with the title of the book clearly printed on its flank. Instead of this result, some unwritten law, as violently despotic as that which used to compel the three-volume issue, has decreed that the London romance shall always appear in a cloth-bound volume at six shillings; the most foolish price that could be selected, too dear to be suitable for private purchase, too low to allow of a handsome edition being issued. There is something grotesquely ludicrous, as well as extremely painful, in seeing the lists of 'ten new six-shilling novels,' or 'a dozen new six-shilling novels,' whereby some publishers' advertisement lists are disfigured in the newspapers with every new season. It makes a commerce of fiction in a manner most injurious and deplorable.

Again, no sooner has the six-shilling novel been a year before the public, than the publisher issues the self-same book at two-and-sixpence. Why does he cut his own throat thus? It is to me as inexplicable as why the London drapers sell you a stuff at six shillings a yard in February, but, if you wait till June, sell it you at two-and-sixpence a yard at the clearance sales. Either the stuff is sold at a price unjust and unfair to the purchaser in February, or it is sold at a price unjust and unfair to the vendor in June. From this proposition there seems to me no escape.

It is the same with the six-shilling book as with the draper's stuffs. If the first price be correct, why alter

it to the second in a year's time? If the second price be sufficient to pay expense of production, why not start with it.

The draper, moreover, has an advantage over the publisher. If I want a stuff whilst it is a novelty, and when its like has not been worn by shop girls and servant girls, I must buy it at its high price in February; but if I want to read a novel whilst it is at its highest price, I can read it in that form, taking it from the libraries, and wait for a year to buy it at its lower price, if I then care to do so, which it is improbable that I shall do.

Now, why not have from first to last, in London, an edition of a novel similar to that French form which is good enough for Pierre Loti, for Gyp, for Anatole France, for the brilliant Frères Margueritte? Why?

I suppose because our masters, the librarians, will not have it so; or because some other unwritten law lies like lead on the souls of London publishers.

I read few English books for pleasure myself, I prefer the literatures of other countries; but it pains me to see such a deluge of worthless verbosity pour from London lanes and London streets where printing presses of yore worked for Addison and Goldsmith, Thackeray and Arthur Helps.

If this stream of pseudo-literature be not stopped, it will carry away and swamp all true English literature under it, as a moving bog covers flocks and pastures, cottages and country seats.

I have asked several London publishers why it is allowed to go on; their answers are evasive and

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contradictory. They assert that most of the volumes published are paid for by the authors; that they themselves must publish something, or cease to exist as a trade; and that the public does not know good from bad, so it does not matter what is printed. Yet, surely to them, as to the drapers, the apparently insensate system must be lucrative, or it would not be pursued?

There was a comical lamentation in the London Press the other day for what was called 'the death of the novel'; not the approaching death which I expect for it by suffocation under the dust-storms of verbosity and imbecility, but of death by its own suicide, through its own curtailed proportions. It was indignantly asked why it was not as long as it used to be in the 'Fifties and 'Sixties, and why novelists now wrote short stories which in that period would have found no sale, would not, indeed, have even found the preliminary necessary to a sale-publication.

Surely we remember some short stories called *The Cricket on the Hearth* and *The Chimes*, and others telling the adventures of the Great Hoggarty Diamond and of one Barry Lyndon? As for the length of novels nowadays, my own *Massarenes*, published in 1897, contains precisely the same number of words as *Esmond*, and, I think, Mr Mallock's novels, and those of Mrs Humphry Ward, must surely be quite as long, whilst Mr Hall Caine's marvellous narratives appear as endless as 'the thread of Time reel'd off the wheel of Fate.' The critic who grieves over the brevity of present-day volumes, thinks that Thackeray and

Dickens wrote at such length because they were obliged to fill their monthly numbers! It seems to me far more likely that they were in love with their characters, as every writer of true talent is, and lingered tenderly over many needless details and dialogues out of sheer pleasure in their creations; and it must be admitted that both of them had naturally a discursive style, which would have been the better for some excision. But were it true that there is an unwritten law which limits or expands the length of romances according to the public caprice or taste, surely nothing could be more harmful to fiction than such limitation? Every story, if it be worth the telling, has its own natural length, which cannot be stretched or shortened arbitrarily without hurt. The sculptor knows that the form which he creates has its own natural proportions, its own inherent symmetry according to natural rules, which he must obey. The painter knows that, according to the nature of his subject, and of his intended treatment, he must take for his picture, either a small panel, a kit-kat, or a large canvas; and that if he force its dimensions, either by over-compression or over-extension, his work will be a failure.

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Why is the author not bound by the same canon of art? Artistically, he certainly is so bound. Intellectually, he certainly is so bound. That this obligation is continually defied and broken through by many English writers, proves only that the great majority of these writers are not artists in any sense of the word.

The brevity or length of a literary work can have nothing to do with its beauty or excellence. If it be

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beautiful, if it be excellent, its proportions will be those which naturally grew out of its subject; and the writer who is an artist will know, as the painter knows, that he cannot alter the unwritten law which prescribes to him those proportions. What has either length or brevity to do with either excellence or beauty? What give both excellence and beauty are qualities not to be measured by a publisher's counting up of words, or a printer's enumeration of pages.

A sketch of a few pages of Maupassant's is worth all the volumes put together of Georges Ohnet; one of the *Sonnets of Proteus* is worth the whole swagger of the *Seven Seas*.

There seems to be, unhappily, an unwritten law in English literature that cheapness must of necessity be allied to ugliness. A cheap book is in England an inferior and unlovely thing. But it need not be so. It is not so everywhere. I have now before me a book of Pompeo Molmenti's, issued by Bemporad, of Florence; its cost is two francs twenty-five centièmes; less than one-and-sixpence in your money. It is bound in thick cream-coloured paper; it is called *Il Moretto di Brescia*, being a brief study of the life and works of the great artist of whose pure and noble work the city of Brescia is full. That the text is of rare scholarly excellence, and of the finest critical and appreciative qualities, there can be no question, since it is written by the President of the Accademia delle Arte of Venice. The type is large, the paper fine, the illustrations (phototyped) are of extreme delicacy and beauty, rendering worthily the works of the Moretto; the size of the book is Imperial 8vo.

Will you tell me where I should find anything equal to it at its price in London? *Unwritten Literary Laws*

Your books are all ill-stitched, and fall to pieces as soon as one handles them. Your type is usually ugly, even at its best; all foreign readers complain of its clumsiness and confusing effect on the eyes. Compare a page of a Parisian book at three francs and a half with a page of a six-shilling English novel. The former is incomparably the superior. Your cheap illustrated books are still more scandalously treated. I have before me a book priced four-and-sixpence, more than ~~double~~ treble the price of *Il Moretto*. It is a book for children; its illustrations have been reproduced from earlier works, and they are not even all of the same method or the same size; some are printed from old wood-blocks, some are photographed; in one a child is represented the size of a fly, in another a dog is drawn bigger than a man; anything is thought good enough, it seems, for children. Artistic beauty is entirely lacking in the illustrations of English juvenile books; and there is nothing so irritating as the sight of illustrations of various qualities bound up in the same volume.

Even certain illustrated periodicals and journals are not above using up their old wood-blocks in their new numbers. It is a very disgraceful and unworthy practice. When the illustrations are fresh, the designer frequently does not attempt to adapt them to the text; a gentlemen is drawn like a cad, and a Newfoundland dog is drawn like a poodle; a peasant of the Romagna is drawn like a loafer in Shoreditch, and so on continually, without the slightest attention to accuracy.

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There is also, beyond all doubt, an unwritten law which has been so universally observed that it has become, properly, as binding as a written law. I mean the law that when once a romance, or a story, or a poem have been published they cannot be altered.

What should we think of the painter who repainted his picture after sale, or of a sculptor who sawed off an arm from his statue, and affixed another? Both picture and statue may have many faults; they probably have; but such as they went out from the studio they must remain. This is the common morality, the elementary honour, of art, and a similar canon should certainly lie upon literature.

Yet some writers have of late presumed that they had a right to change the ending of their romances when these were already well known to their readers. They would urge, I suppose, that they have a right to do what they like with their own. But your work once given to the public is no more your own than your daughter is when you have married her, and she has become the *Gaia* of her *Gaius*.

Besides, there is an unspoken good faith on the part of the author which should be observed in his relations towards the public. He should give them nothing which is incomplete; nothing, at least, which is not as harmonious as it is in his power to create. Every work of fiction requires to be long dreamed of, long thought of, clearly seen in the mind before written; it ought to be no more susceptible of change than a conclusion in Euclid. To the writer, as to the reader of a story, it should seem absolutely true; the actors in it should appear absolutely real. The illusion of

reality is only strong in the reader according to the strength of that illusion in the writer; but some such illusion must always exist whilst the reader reads fiction, or fiction would have no attraction for anyone. The writer who alters his romance after it has once appeared destroys this illusion, and says effectively to his public, 'What fools you are to take me seriously!' Moreover, he insults them, for he tells them that he has set before them a half-finished and immature thing, about which he has entirely changed his mind. He is like a cook who should snatch off the table a dish just placed on it because he wished to alter the flavour. A Vätel or a Soyer would not do that: if he had made a mistake he would abide by it, though he might kill himself in despite at it.

In the course of a literary or artistic life, or any other life from which the blessing of privacy has been lost, there are many wrongs met with which are real and great wrongs, yet which must be endured because they cannot be remedied by law suits, and there is no other kind of tribunal open; nothing analogous, for instance, to the German Courts of Honour in military matters.

There is, for example, a habit amongst some editors of seeking the expression of opinion, on some political or public question, of some well-known writer; printing this expression of opinion, and, before it is published, showing the proof to some other writer, so that an article of contrary views and opinions may be written in readiness for the following number. Now this seems to me an absolutely disloyal betrayal of trust. In the first place, the proof of an article is of necessity

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entirely dependent on the good faith of the editor. It is an understood thing, a tacit, unwritten law, that no one except the editor is to see it until the public does so. It is never considered necessary to stipulate this. To show it to a third person to obtain a refutation, or a burlesque, of it before the article is published, seems to me a distinctly incorrect thing to do; an extremely unfair thing to do. Yet it is becoming a common practice; and a writer has no redress against it. It is manifestly not the kind of offence which can be taken into a tribunal, yet it is a very genuine and very annoying injury, and it is one against which I think that authors, whose names are of value, should be protected in some manner.

What redress, moreover, is there for the innumerable thefts from which a writer suffers during his career? I doubt if we, any of us, know the extent to which we are robbed by bookmakers, who are not of the turf, but are quite as unscrupulous as those of the turf.

A few years ago I saw, in the pages of one of the highest class of London periodicals, a story, contained in one number, which was nothing more or less than the reproduction of the Derbyshire part of my well-known novel of *Puck:* the narrative of Ben Dare and his love for his worthless sister Anice. It was far more than a plagiarism; it was a monstrous theft. The name of a lady was put at the end of it, as that of the author; of course, I wrote to the editor, expecting, despite previous experiences, to receive apology and reparation. I misunderstood my generation. The editor wrote back, with airy indifference, that the lady

who had produced this shameless piracy had never read *Unwritten Puck.* To my citation, in reply, of the words of the Emperor Julian, 'If it be sufficient to deny, who will ever be found guilty?' and to my objection that an appropriation of an entire section of a novel could not by any possibility be otherwise than an intentional theft, this model of editors replied not at all. I ought, perhaps, to have sued the publisher, who was doubtless quite innocent, but had I done so it is more than probable that I should have obtained no apology or redress. To begin a law suit is a very serious thing, and all these grievances and piracies are so incessant, though few are quite as impudent as was this, that if one pursued them as they merit one would spend all one's life and substance in Courts of Law.

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Moreover, in the case of the plaintiff in any suit residing out of England, a large sum for costs must be deposited at the English tribunal into which the suit is brought; a kind of foregone conclusion that the plaintiff has no valid case, which seems to me very prejudicial to that person.

What, then, is to be done in such circumstances?

Nothing at all. You must endure the injury, leave unpunished the plagiarism; and the offender escapes scot-free.

I do not think that anyone should sue another for any mere expression of opinion, however hostile or rudely expressed, as Mr Whistler sued Mr Ruskin, for the liberty of the Press is of more importance than the annoyance of individuals.

But some protection is required against swindling in literature; and at the present moment none exists.

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Practically none exists either against libel. I saw, a few years ago, three very gross and libellous English newspaper articles upon myself, and sent them to a high personage in the law, who is always kind enough to give me his advice, and asked him if he considered it worth while for me to prosecute them. He wrote me in answer: 'All three articles are foully slanderous, yet one only, perhaps, would come within the grip of the law; upon this one you would most certainly obtain damages, but prosecution entails so much expense, trouble, worry, and insult, to the aggrieved party, that I would always say to any friend of mine what I say now to you: Do not do that which you have a perfect right to do.'

I followed the advice, for if one asks counsel of a person whom one respects, one ought to submit to it; but the fact remains that, for the most offensive social libels, there is, neither in law nor in society, any means of obtaining redress which a great lawyer can honestly recommend to a friend. For such matters, why cannot there be a tribunal set apart from other tribunals; one having the attributes of a Court of Honour, and without the odious publicity of Courts of Law?

Against libel, even of the grossest character, what can one do, as the law stands, which is not more disagreeable than silently to 'grin and bear' it? The great preliminary cost; the extreme uncertainty and irritation involved, the odious publicity necessarily incurred; the chatter, the comments, the cross-examination; the insolence and the jeers of the counsel for the defence, are all punishments which fall upon the plaintiff. What consolation is it for them that he

may perhaps be awarded a thousand pounds damages, though it is more probable that he will receive only a farthing, and be left to the enjoyment of paying his own costs? In either result, is the game worth its very costly candle? Is the injury made less an injury? Is the combat not in every sense most unjust and unequal, being less a combat indeed than an assassination by a bravo? To what can we ever look for any remedy of this except from the unwritten law of opinion? But as the world is at present constituted it delights far too greatly in this garbage for it ever to rebuke the providers of it. Hogs do not rend the man who carries the swill-tub.

In one of the Prince Consort's letters to his eldest daughter, then Crown Princess of Prussia, he tells her to set aside a portion of her money every year to meet the inevitable blackmail which will certainly be levied upon her. This blackmail is levied on every kind of success as well as on royalty. What is to be done? To submit to it, is repugnant to all one's sense of justice; to rebel against it, however such resistance be justified, is often ruinous.

The true remedy would lie in a finer, juster, higher kind of public feeling; but where is there any likelihood of this arising in the world as it is?

My own feeling is very strongly always against the anonymity of the Press. Everyone surely should have the candour and courage to put his signature after his opinions. But, unfortunately, the Press gains so much importance (fictitious importance) from its anonymity that it is hopeless to ask for an unwritten or a written law on this subject. The arrogant 'we' would soon

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fall to zero in its influence on the public if it were signed by a Tom, Dick, or Harry, who, as Matthew Arnold used to say, forms his opinions from what he overhears on the knifeboard of a city or suburban omnibus. It is, perhaps, worthy of a nation which treats duelling as a penal offence to countenance anonymous assertions, anonymous opinions, anonymous bravado, and anonymous insults; but the result cannot be beneficial to the national character.

For many months in this past year, and in the year before that, hundreds of anonymous correspondents and leader-writers of the English Press have been doing their utmost by violence of language to drive to war the nations of England and of France. Is it not probable, even certain, that if all these writers had been obliged to sign their names to these furious articles, they would have paused before making themselves responsible for such language? I am often accused of using too strong language; but at all events I sign whatever I say, and I should be ashamed to do otherwise. An anonymous Press possesses dangerous privileges; such privileges as the mask gives a masquerade; it also, as I have said, acquires a dignity and an importance which are not its own; it is unfair and harmful; it protects exaggeration, hyperbole, flattery, and calumny, but it is too useful to too many not to be sustained; it can always serve the Bourses much better than a signed Press could do, and obey much more efficiently the nods and signs and cypher dispatches of the great financiers; but it is cowardly, and can easily, if it chooses, be dishonest.

It will, perhaps, be objected that the anonymity of

the Press is more apparent than real; that the greater writers of the London Press at least are all recognised by their style, or well known by the initiated; but this knowledge is limited to a few hundred persons, and can never be shared by the general public, and it is on the general public that anonymous journalism has its chief influence.

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To whom or what can we look for the pressure of an influence which would enforce honesty in literature? To public opinion? Undoubtedly we might, and we should, if public opinion were what it should be. But it is not, and, most probably, never will be. Breeding and manners grow worse every day; and it is they alone which could enforce that unwritten code which is so sorely needed. It is, after all, the absence of moral and honourable feeling in the world in general which makes the violation of these not only condoned by others but frequently profitable to the sinners. Take two instances of this: The sale of private letters both of the living and of the dead; and the seizure of the plots and characters of romances by people who are themselves dramatic adapters. The latter is the more trivial offence of the two; but it is as impudent as it is dishonest. It is injurious in a great degree, and extremely annoying to the original author, whose name is bawled and placarded about in connection with that of his robber, with no consent of his own, and usually to his extreme irritation, whilst his ideas are borrowed, and his characters travestied, and hi entire creation belittled and vulgarised. Would the stalls be filled nightly to witness pieces stolen in this manner were the public governed by any unwritten law of respect for *meum* and *tuum?*

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The other offence of selling letters is still more heinous; it is difficult to conceal the piracy of a romance for theatrical purposes, but it is perfectly easy to conceal the sale of letters; head it the sale of autographs, and it passes with entire impunity. There is, I believe, a law (a written law) that letters are the property of the writer of them; but it is absolutely a dead law; as dead as many of those of the Tudors or Stuarts. I think that letters ought to be the property of the recipient, but it should be an inalienable property which he should be no more able to sell than he is able to sell entailed property. To write a letter, even a brief one, is, in a sense, an act of confidence. In writing it we assume that its contents will not be used against us, either for injury or ridicule. If a conversation be considered confidential, how much more should a correspondence be so! A letter, in any degree intimate, is a hostage given into the hands of its recipient. We are justified in expecting that any sentiments, views, or opinions it may contain shall not go beyond the reader for whom they have been penned. This is so much to be desired in the interests of all letter-writers that no one, I think, can dispute its justice. What, then, are we to say of the constant appearance in catalogues of sales of letters of living, and of lately dead, persons?

If it be, as I understand, illegal, why is it permitted publicly? If it be not thus illegal, why does not general indignation render it impossible? I have more than once seen, in the autograph-albums of men and women of the world, letters of the most intimate character by distinguished writers; letters

which have been evidently written in the careless, open-heartedness of a warm friendship, and which were lying on a drawing-room or library table, open to the sneer, the jest, or the wonder of everyone who turned over the pages of the book. *Unwritten Literary Laws*

'N'y touchez pas, N'y touchez pas! Je l'ai payé vingt louis!' cried, in my hearing, a lady (a *rastaquouère*), who owned amongst other autographs a letter which it was especially wrong to place in such a collection, since the writer of it is great and is alive. Not for twenty louis, not for twenty thousand, should it ever have been purchasable. What traitor sold it? What servant stole it? How did it find its way into the market, that familiar and intimate thing? Through treachery, through death, through accident, through greed? We shall never know. It was certainly not through friendship.

Surely, also, some unwritten law should prescribe and limit the license of caricature. It is scarcely fair that, because a personality has interest and eminence attached to it, every draughtsman who can scrawl a line can make that personality hideous or ridiculous at pleasure.

'You cannot like it?' I said once to a person of considerable eminence, who was the subject that week of one of the 'Portraits' of a satirical and political English journal of wide circulation.

'No, I do not!' he answered. 'Of course, I should not object to it if it were a pen-and-ink drawing being handed about to amuse people in my own country house; but when one knows that it will be seen by tens of thousands of people who

will never see me in the flesh, the thing becomes annoying.'

His opinion must be shared by all those who are thus pilloried, even if they think it politic to laugh and seem indifferent.

It is 'the penalty of distinction,' the offenders reply. But why should distinction be weighted by a penalty, like the successful racer? I believe that the world in general is the loser by this kind of persecution; for dislike to the vulgar ridicule which snarls at the heels of all eminence in this day, keeps aloof from the public arena men who would do honour to it, but whose strength of intellect is accompanied by shyness, pride, and sensitive reserve. Some unwritten law should also render impossible those verbal libels which are continually published by persons cunning enough to keep to the windward side of law in the offensive matter which they write. This is again another penalty-weight laid on the back of the racer who has won; and it is precisely this kind of penalty from which an unwritten law, in the Press, and in the world, should protect such winners of the gold cups of life.

The unwritten law of common honour should make such a book as that which was recently issued on Bismarck impossible, because those who would have the power of writing it would be above the temptation of doing so. There may be a strong temptation to say what we know better than any other of one whose name is eminent. But I doubt whether we should yield to the temptation, even if we ourselves suffer in reputation by not doing so. But the book-

makers of the world have no such excuse as this temptation offers; they are merely footmen who have listened with pricked ears whilst they waited at table on their masters, and when their master is powerless to chastise, sell what they remember or invent. Even where it is not libellous, the sickening intrusion into private life which nowadays disgraces journalism must, to any temper of any refinement and reserve, be an offence irritating beyond endurance. There are flatteries and intrusions beside which censure is sweet and obloquy would be welcome.

There is a great pathos in the fact that the greatest man of these last fifty years, the man of blood and iron, should, as soon as he lies in his coffin, be insulted by such a book as this. The hand in its steel gauntlet, which welded fragments into a nation, is powerless to defend its owner against betrayal and false witness. The vulgar, insatiable curiosity of the general world breeds such traitors as these makers of post-mortem recollections; breeds them, nourishes them, recompenses them. There would be no supply if there were no demand. The general world has a greedy appetite for diseased food; as with its jaws it devours putrid game, decayed oysters, and the swollen livers of tortured geese, so it loves to devour with its frothy brain all that belittles, ridicules, dishonours, or betrays the few amongst it—the very few!—who are above it in mind, in will, in force, in fame. 'Come, come!' they cry to the great man's servants when the great man lies dead; 'tell us, you who saw him in his hours of abandonment, tell us of all that can drag him down nearer to our level! Tell us of his varicocele, tell us

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of his dyspepsia, tell us of his caprices, tell us of his humours, tell us of his tears when his poisoned dog lay dying—you saw them through the keyhole—tell us of his hasty words, his pettish foibles, his human mortal waywardness—you know so much about them, you who waited behind his chair and filled his tobacco-pouch—come, come, comfort us; his great shadow seems still to lie upon the earth and make us small and crawling insects crushed by his spurred boot—come, come, comfort us! Tell us, show us, make us happy belittling him; let us, the envious, the puny, the mean, rejoice, for you who cleaned his boot and held his bare foot in your hired hand, can tell us that he, the maker of emperors and of nations, he, the Mighty, had Achilles' heel!' For there is an unwritten law, not of literature but of life, which decrees that the jealousy of the small soul for the great soul shall be cruel and deathless as Fate.[1]

[1] Since this was written, the letters of Ruskin and Rossetti have been published: a greater offence against dead men could not be committed.

IX

AUBERON HERBERT

THIS little square book, the colour of meadow forget-me-nots, is so modest and simple that it may very easily be passed over in a period which has little sympathy with tenderness of feeling and simplicity of expression. The verses, of which this small volume is full, resemble the *stornelli* and *rispetti* of Italian songs rather than any kind of verse which has preceded them in English literature, unless it be the earliest and briefest songs of Robert Lytton, with which they have a certain kindred, both in their measure and in their themes. Auberon Herbert is known to the world as a daring and original thinker, a sociologist who lives three centuries before his time, a fearless preacher of new liberties and ideal creeds; in this tiny azure booklet he is also a poet, or, as he would rather himself say, a singer. The verse springs from the depths of his heart, and calls to those who, like himself, have loved and suffered and found nothing endure except the consolations of natural beauty. *Auberon Herbert*

'In the West is the golden glory,
As the great king goes to his rest;
In the East the purple staineth
The hills from foot to crest.

'And I stand and look in wonder
Till my heart is cleft in twain,
Half for the vision of glory,
And half for the dying pain.'

Like the Italian *canzone*, these little lyrics, brief as a summer breeze, which momentarily sways the stalks of grass, must be heard with the ear of the heart. Coldly criticised by the mind alone, they will lie like the gathered field-poppy, inert and colourless. They are the cries of the heart, like those brief verses which the southern lover sings to the sobbing lute beneath the moon. He who has killed his heart in the pressure of the world will find nothing in them. They who are steeped in the chill indifference of mundane interests will no more heed them than such heed the skylark's or the linnet's song, which they resemble. They were not written in the study, or fashioned with the pruning-knife; they were born by the edge of the sea, in the woodland shade, by the clover path of the country hedge, in the falling rain of the peach and pear-blossoms, in the starlight above the olives. They are the elder children of the lonely shores and flowering pastures; they have never known the gaslight of the streets or the electric light of the drawing-room. They are as sweet and pure as violets.

To those who know, and respect as they should be respected, the virile and original philosophies of the writer, there is an added charm in these tender blossoms in the fact that they spring from the same intelligence as that which proclaims individualism in

its boldest forms and attacks the tyrannies of social and political superstitions. *Auberon Herbert*

They are but little songs, short as a ripple of music from a woodlark's throat, of no more account, if you will, than the blue stars of mouse-ear by the brook's side, than the dog-rose on the bank; too simple it may be said, speaking of emotions too trite, of sorrow too common, of sights too familiar, in language that the dullest can scarce fail to understand. Yes; no doubt, they are like field-flowers, like hedge-birds; they claim to be no more than these; they were not wrestled for as Wordsworth wrestled for an ode beneath the shadow of Rydal, or as Coleridge strove with the rebellious forces of a halting sonnet when lying down face foremost amongst 'the common grass.' They are spontaneous utterances, as natural as the ripple of the water over the cresses in a brook's bed beneath willow and alder. It may be easy to dismiss them with indifference, to underrate them with hypercritic sneer, and assuredly those who take pleasure in the strained archaic obscurities of much modern verse will find no more charm in them than the languid æsthete, musing over the pages of Verlaine and Mallarme, would find in a sea-wet breeze blowing across a hayfield at early morning. There is no studied mannerism, no sought-for darkness of expression, no exaggerated ecstasy or pessimism; there is such a natural feeling, of joy as of sorrow, as comes to the soul at once robust and sensitive; and these are expressed with frank, unstudied *naïveté*, with the candour as of a child, and the self-control of a man blent in their simplicity. 'Look in your own

heart and write,' has been the only precept which their creator has obeyed.

The most intense attachment in them is for the sea. The sea, whether those grey sad tides which sway from the sands of Christchurch to the rocks of Freshwater, or that azure radiance which rolls from the headland of Antibes to the gardens of Porto Fino, has the same magic for Auberon Herbert that it has for Algernon Swinburne; a charm much calmer and more peaceful, but not less strong. Many of these little poems speak of the sea only; are full of that happy sense of return and recognition which so many amongst us feel when, after absence from the sea, we tread again its wet salt sands, and feel its white spray dance against our cheek. Swinburne is the great laureate of ocean, the chords of whose mighty lyre reverberate with the ocean storm and echo the thunder of breakers breaking upon iron shores, and of billows sweeping from pole to pole. The song of Auberon Herbert is the homing cry of the sea-swallows swaying on the crest of the waves.

'Back to the Sea Mother' he calls these yearning lines:—

'Kindest of mothers, from whom I have strayed,
Back again, tired, I come to thee,
Chaunting and crooning the old wave-song;
Sing it, oh! sing it again to me!

'Weary and spent as the hour draws near,
Hush me to sleep with the soft wave-song;

Wash all the cares away, wash all the strifes away, *Auberon Herbert*
All the old pains that to living belong.

'Down at thy side I place me to rest;
Slowly my senses are stealing from me;
Passions and pleadings have ceased in my breast,
Gently my spirit floats away free.'

And yet again :—

'Thou great strong sea, fast lock'd in dreams,
Clouds journeying to and fro,
Whose tender blue the stars come through,
I can but love ye so!

'Ye take possession of my heart,
And all my life renew;
Like grain of dust I grow a part,
A small stray part of you.

'Thy sounds, O storm, are far and faint,
As thou stridest over the sea;
And we need thy breath from many a taint
To set us clean and free.

'But when thou comest on mighty wings,
Deal gently with forest and tree,
For my heart is woe for the goodly things
That to-morrow will cease to be.

'Yes! I shall go and you will dream,
And drink the pale blue sky,
Beneath the hill that hugs you round
As silver days go by.

'When others come your love to claim,
You still, you pale blue sea,

Auberon Herbert

Oh, shall you mean for them the same,
That once you meant for me?

'And shall they look on you with eyes
As tender true as mine,
And love each changing gleam that flies
Across that face of thine?'

I dislike the translation of expression from one art to another, otherwise I would call these verses impressionist. They have the quickly-captured forms, the frail fugitive colour, the infinite suggestiveness, which are the notes of the highest impressionism in painting.

See these eight lines:—

'The sun is at rest—for the storms are o'er;
Just touch'd with the hand of night,
And a line of shadow creeps to the shore,
Then flashes in silver light—

'Like a note that stops in its flight and droops,
And clings for a while to the ground;
Then trembles and wakes from its trance and breaks
Into passion and glory of sound.'

How entirely true are these to the breaking of a smooth, pale expanse of water into motion and light; the sudden flashing as of a million spears with which the sea, when smitten by the sword of the Sun, rises to the challenge of Morning. And yet by what simple and common words this strong effect is produced!

Or this :— *Auberon Herbert*

'Only a bit of land-locked bay,
With a haunting face on the further side ;
Yet the ocean as well might bar the way,
So far from each other our lives divide.

'For you jest at times, and at times you pray,
And you tread a path that cannot be mine ;
And the world is with you from day to day,
And all that you are I dare not divine.'

Or this :—

'In the glory of youth the young man went ;
His heart with pride was stirred ;
"They should yield," he cried, "to the message sent,
And force of the burning word."

'The long years passed and a wearied man
Crept back to the old home door :
"I have spoken my word and none has heard,
And the great world rolls as before."'

Or this :—

'Forward we look, and we gild it all,
Rich is the picture and tender and fair,
Backward we look, and the blue mists fall,
Veiling the troubles that once were there.

'Ah ! well, and ah ! well, and lighter the load,
If heart the enchanter weave his web ;
If he tells love-stories to cheat the road,
And binds in our dreams the purple thread.'

Auberon Herbert

Or this :—

'Ah! love so sweet, and patient, and fond,
I wandered far from thy sight,
And I said to myself that the world beyond
Was a garden rich with delight.

'And there rose an image from morn to morn
Of new bewildering days,
Till my heart grew proud and I thought with scorn
Of the peaceful homely ways.

'For the young are light, and I never had learnt
To know the false from the true,
And my feet were drawn where the far lights burnt
With their wonder strange and new.

'And now how bitter to heart is the taste,
And gone are the folly and pride;
And I save what I can from the years of waste
And stand once more at thy side.'

It will be seen that the store of words at the singer's command is limited; his palette is set with few colours; his lute has but few strings; and it is in this that he resembles the singers of the Italian folk-songs and couplets which have only the limited vocabulary of the peasant to express so many of the deepest chords of human feeling. These English verses might, like those Italian *canzone*, be created by one to whom all the stores of knowledge and of culture were sealed books. They are cast in the simplest of all possible forms of expression, and there is not one which would not suit the plaintive measure

of a crooning ballad sung in twilight by the embers of a cottage hearth. They suggest their own music, and it would be difficult to read them aloud without falling into some rhythmical balance of their lines.

Auberon Herbert is, we know by his prose works, master of rich stores of language and of scholarship; therefore this simplicity of style in his verses springs, not from poverty of resources, but from correctness of instinct. These songs are *naïf* as a child's prayer at its mother's knee at eventide; were they ornate or elaborate they would cease to be, as they are now, the frank and spontaneous utterances of the soul, natural, I have said, as song of linnet or of lark.

Let those who love pure, simple, unstudied, and unborrowed things send for the little azure book, and read it for themselves; not in noisy railway train, or metropolitan library, or fashion-filled country house; but in the solitude of some quiet rural place, beside some nameless streamlet where the willow-leaves touch the blue brook-lime and the bees hum amidst the flowering thyme.

When we take it home, as the day dies, let us place it on a shelf between the hymns of George Herbert and those earliest love-songs which were signed Owen Meredith. There it will find its fit companionship.

X

THE UGLINESS OF MODERN LIFE

The Ugliness of Modern Life

PIERRE LOTI has lately written in an album published at Schweningen for charity the following passages, which will be new to the majority of English readers :—

'The end of April is the season of change, when the Judas trees all along the shores of the Bosphorus are in flower. Nowhere else in the world does one find so many Judas trees as here, where the two extremities of Asia and of Europe are face to face. There are violet-hued tufts and violet-hued alleys; an excess of violet colour so intense, and so unusual, that one's sight is dazzled and bewildered by it. And the wisteria too, which garlands the old eaves of houses with its millions of clusters, hangs out wreaths of a lighter lilac from all the hamlets of grey timber which lean down over the water. This Bosphorus is a great winding river, but a river which has in it the life and the seduction of the sea. The hills on its two shores are covered by palaces, by mosques, by cottages and by tombs, all surrounded by and buried in gardens.

And here in the month of April, under this sky still veiled and softened by the clouds of the North, there is a luxury of foliage and blossom in which this violet tone of the Judas trees is dominant, and shines beside the dark and ghost-like cypress groves. *The Ugliness of Modern Life*

'There are on earth other places grander, and perhaps more beautiful; certainly there are none of greater power to charm. This scenery of the Bosphorus, from which no stranger ever escapes, is due to the Oriental mystery which still broods on it; it comes from the great closed harems of which the upper storeys hang over the waves; it comes from the veiled women whom we see in the shadow of the gardens, and in the slender caïques which pass. But this Turkish witchery is fading, alas! Year by year, more and more, great gaps are made in the ranks of the ancient impenetrable buildings, with their grated windows, which plunge their walls into the water and which one could enter from the water, as at Venice; and with them go the slender caïques, the costumes, and the women's veils.

'Already, even since last spring, Therapia seems to exist no longer, masked as it is by a gigantic and hideous caravanserai; the exquisite Anatoli Hissar is disfigured by an American college, of a sinister ugliness, which has stuck itself above the ancient castle with an imbecile air of domination.

'And everywhere it is the same story, whether on the shores of Asia or the shores of Europe; frightful new buildings cumber the ground and factory chimneys rise beside minarets of which they are the miserable caricatures. In vain do the Judas trees

continue their beautiful flowering; the Bosphorus will soon perish, destroyed by idiotic speculators. And the Turks, my dear friends the Turks, have the indolence or fatalism to let such destruction be wrought every day under their eyes!'

Thus Loti with his poet's soul, his prose which is a golden lyre; and it seems to me as I translate his words that his lament for the Judas trees and the Bosphorus is but the embodiment of a lament which sighs over the whole world. The beauty of the earth is dying, dying like a creature with a cancer in its breast.

The writer of the *Foundations of Belief* thinks that the earth was made for man; if this presumptuous conviction had indeed any foundation at all what an ingrate would the recipient of the gift have proved himself, what an imbecile, as Loti calls him!

The loss of beauty from the world is generally regarded as the purely sentimental grievance of imaginative persons; but it is not so; it is a loss which must impress its vacuity fatally on the human mind and character. It tends, more than any other loss, to produce that apathy, despondency, and cynical indifference which are so largely characteristic of the modern temper.

The people are taught to think that all animal life may be tortured and slaughtered at pleasure; that physical ills are to be feared beyond all others, and escaped at all vicarious cost; that profit is the only question of importance in commerce; that antiquity, loveliness, and grace are like wild flowers, mere weeds

to be torn up by a steam harrow. This is not the temper which makes noble characters, or generous and sensitive minds. It is the temper which accumulates wealth, and which flies readily to war to defend that wealth; but which is absolutely barren of all impersonal sympathy, of all beautiful creation.

Taken as a whole, artists have the kindliest natures and the happiest temperaments of any body of men. Why? because their minds are always more or less susceptible to the impressions and influences of beauty —beauty of line, of hue, of proportion, of suggestion; beauty alike of the near and of the far; and they surround themselves with their own ideals of these in such measure as their powers permit. But, even in artists, modern life tends to deform these ideals, and in any exhibition of modern paintings ninety-nine out of a hundred of these works will be ugly; they will display, perhaps, admirable technique, complete mastery of detail, fine brush work, perhaps unexceptionable drawing, but the combination of these qualities will produce merely a sense of ugliness on the retina of the observer of them.

Unless the man of genius buries himself resolutely in the country and by the sea, as Tennyson did, as Clausen does, he cannot altogether escape the influence of the unloveliness of modern life. It would be impossible to painters and poets to live in Regent's Park or the Avenue de Villiers, in Cromwell Road or the Via Nazionale, or in any of the new quarters of English or Continental towns, unless their instincts of beauty had become dulled and dwarfed by the atmosphere around them; life for any length of time

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would be insupportable to them under the conditions in which it is of necessity lived in modern cities; and this perversion of their natural instincts makes the tendency to replace beauty by eccentricity and by weirdness fatally frequent. Their critics obey the same influences, and modern art-criticism, like the recent studies of Robert de la Sizzeranne on English painting, is characterised by what appears to be a total incapacity to appreciate the quality of beauty, a total insensibility to its absence from modern art.

In sculpture this is as remarkable as in painting, and is still more alarming and painful, the ugliness of realism and of eccentricity being a still more offensive blasphemy in marble than it is in colour. If the most ordinary sense of beauty, as distinguished from deformity, were not extinct in the world, would any one of the monuments erected within the last half century be allowed to disfigure the cities of Europe? Carnot in a frock coat lying in the arms of a female, supposed to represent France, with his boots thrust out towards the spectator; Victor Emanuel in a cocked hat with his body like a swollen bladder stuck on two wooden ninepins; Peabody sitting in an arm-chair as if he awaited a dentist; old William of Prussia like a child's tin soldier magnified, and with the greater men who made him dwarfed military manikins underneath; black-metal Garibaldis, and Gordons, and Napiers, and Macmahons; Claude Bernard in the act of mutilating a live dog—every imaginable abomination in every street and square of every capital, and even of every noticeable town, proclaim to all the quarters of the globe the debasement of a once pure and lofty art, and the utter

ineptitude and vulgarity of modern taste. Of what use is it to attempt to educate the nations when such things as these are set up in their midst?

An English archbishop at a recent Royal Academy banquet said that he hoped the time was near at hand when every child in England would learn to draw. Apart from the gross folly of teaching a child anything for which its own natural talent does not predispose it, and the injury done to the world by the artificial manufacture of millions of indifferent draughtsmen, what use can it be to attempt to awaken perception of art in a generation which is begotten where art and nature are alike persistently outraged?

It is entirely useless to multiply art schools, and desire that every child should learn to draw, when all the tendencies of modern life have become such that every rule of art is violated in it and every artistic sense offended in an ordinary daily walk.

Amongst even the most cultured classes few have really any sensibility to beauty. Not one in a thousand pauses in the hurried excitements of social life to note beauty in nature; to art there is accorded a passing attention because it is considered *chic* to do so; but all true sense of art must be lacking in a generation whose women wear the spoils of tropical birds, slain for them, on their heads and skirts, and whose men find their principal joy for nearly half the year in the slaughter of tame creatures, and bespatter with blood the white hellebore of their winter woods.

Beauty is daily more and more withdrawn from the general life of the people. Fidgety and repressive bye-laws tend to suppress that element of the

picturesque which popular life by its liberties, and by its open-air pastimes and peddlings, created for itself. The police are everywhere, and street-life is joyless and colourless. Even within doors, in the houses of poor people, the things of daily usage have lost their old-world charm; the ugly sewing-machine has replaced the spinning-wheel, the cooking-range the spacious open hearth, the veneered machine-made furniture the solid home-made oaken chests and presses, a halfpenny newspaper the old family Bible; whilst out of doors the lads and lasses must not sing or dance, the dog must not play or bark, the chair must not stand out on the pavement, the bells must not ring their chimes, only the cyclist, or the automobilist, lord of all, may tear along and leave broken limbs and bruised flesh of others behind him at his pleasure.

If all feeling for grace and beauty were not extinguished in the mass of mankind at the actual moment, such a method of locomotion as cycling could never have found acceptance; no man or woman with the slightest æsthetic sense could assume the ludicrous position necessary for it. Nor would the auto-car with its stench of petroleum be tolerated for an instant in lanes and roads. Nor could modern dress be endured for a day were there any true sense of fitness, of harmony, and of colour extant in modern times. Even the great Catholic pageants are spoiled in their grouping and splendour by the dull crowds of ill-dressed, dingily clad townsfolk which drown their effect like a vast tide of muddy water rising over a garden of flowers. It is impossible for us,

even when looking at anything so fine in colour as the Carnival at Milan, the Fête Dieu at Brussels, the Students' Festivals in Munich, or any other of the great Continental processions, to judge of what their extreme beauty must have been when not only the procession itself but all the people in the streets, all the whole vast tide of sightseers, comprising even the very beggars, were equally full of colour and 'composed' harmoniously with the central figures.

A gorgeous spectacle of the streets now, whether it be popular, military, or religious, is swamped in the mass of dull-coloured hues, and grotesquely ugly head-gear, common to the whole population of a city. Its effect may struggle as it will: it sinks under the preponderating mass as a butterfly will be beaten down under a dirty, drenching, city rain.

There is a modern custom in Italy which is typical of the havoc made by avarice and indifference and commerce running together hand in hand. It is the shocking habit of stripping all evergreen trees of their leaves to sell them to chemists, gilders, dyers, and the managers of what in France we call *pompes funèbres*. Even magnolias are not spared, and these magnificent trees stand naked and despoiled in nearly all the gardens and parks all over the country. In every town there are now offices for the consignment and purchase of these leaves; to strip and sell, to buy and export them, has become a recognised trade, and hundreds of tons weight are every year, from September to April, sent out of Italy, chiefly to Germany, Austria and Russia.

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The injury done to the trees is, of course, immeasurable. After a few seasons they become anæmic, dry up, and slowly perish, whilst the aspect of the gardens of which the bay, myrtle, box, laurel, arbutus, and magnolia were of late such conspicuous ornaments is, of course, utterly changed and ruined. Unless by some edict of the State the practice be speedily stopped, another generation will see nothing of those avenues and groves and alleys of evergreen foliage which have been the glory of Italian palaces and villas since the days of the Cæsars.

Follow the architectural history of any city, and you find it during the last half-century the sorrowful record of a pitiful destruction. The great gardens are always the first thing sacrificed. They are swept away, and their places covered by brick and mortar with an incredible indifference. Fine houses, even when of recent construction, like the Pompeiian house of Prince Napoleon in Paris, are pulled down out of a mere speculative mania to build something else, or to cut a long, straight street as uninteresting and as unsuggestive as the boxwood protractor which lies on a surveyor's desk.

The greatest crime, or one of the greatest crimes (for there are others black as night), of which the nineteenth century has been guilty has been the driving of the people out of long familiar homes in the name and under the pretext of hygiene, but in fact for the enrichment of contractors, town councillors, and speculators of every kind. It began with Haussmann; it has continued in Paris, and everywhere else, with delirious haste ever since his time, as a burglar

may drag a greybeard to his death. The modern ædiles with their court of ravenous parasites cannot understand, would not deign even to consider, the sorrow of a humble citizen driven out of a familiar little home with nooks and corners filled with memories and a roof-tree dear to generations. Go into an old street of any old city you will, and you will almost certainly find a delight for the eye in archway and ogive, in lintel and casement, in winding stair and leaning eave; in the wallflowers rooted in the steps, in the capsicum which has seeded itself between the stones, in the swallows' nests under the gargoyle, in the pots of basil and mignonette on the window-sills. But the modern street with its dreary monotony, its long and high blank spaces, its even surfaces where not a seed can cling or a bird can build, what will it say to your eyes or your heart? You will see its dull, pretentious uniformity repeated on either side of you down a mile-long vista, and you will curse it.

It is natural that the people shut up in these structures crave for drink, for nameless vices, for the brothel, the opium den, the cheap eating-house and gaming booth; anything, anywhere, to escape from the monotony which surrounds them and which leaves them no more charm in life than if they were rabbits shut up in a physiologist's experimenting cage, and fed on gin-soaked grains. No one in whom the æsthetic sense was really awakened could dwell in a manufacturing city, or indeed in any modern town. The 'flat,' whether in a 'first-class mansion,' or in a 'block' for the working man, would be more intolerable than a

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desert island to anyone with a sense of the true charm of life, or, one may add, any sensitiveness to the meaning of the word 'home'; that word which is to be found in every language, though the English people do not think so, and which is one of the sweetest and most eloquent in all tongues. The Americans attach extreme pride to the fact that their 'sky-scrapers' are so advanced that your horses and carriage can be carried up on a lift to the highest storey, and the nags, if it do not make them dizzy, can survey the city in a bird's-eye view. But even this supreme achievement of architects and engineers cannot lend to the cube, shared with a score of others, the charm, the idiosyncrasy, the meaning, the soul, which exhale from the smallest cottage where those who love dwell all alone, through whose lattices a candle shines as a star to the returning wanderer, and on whose lowly roof memory lies like a benediction.

According to the statistics of modern cities the mass of middle-class and labouring-class people change their lodgings or tenements every two or three years; three years is even an unusually long time of residence. What can a people who flit like this, continually, know of the real meaning of a home?

The same restlessness and dissatisfaction which make these classes change their residence so frequently, make the wealthier classes flit in another way, from continent to continent, from capital to capital, from one pleasure-place to another, from one house-party to another, from the yacht to the *rouge-et-noir* tables, from the bath to the coverside, from the homewoods

to the antipodes, in an endless gyration which yields but little pleasure, but which they deem as necessary as cayenne pepper with their hot soup.

I believe that this monotony and lack of interest in the towns which they inhabit fatally affect the minds of those whose lot it is to go to and from the streets in continual toil, and produce in them fatigue, heaviness and gloom; what the scholar and the poet suffer from articulately and consciously, the people in general suffer from inarticulately and unconsciously. The gaiety of nations dies down as the beauty around them pales and passes. They know not what it is that affects them, but they are affected by it none the less, as a young child is hurt by the darkness, though it knows not what dark or light means.

Admit that the poorer people were ill-lodged in the Middle Ages, that the houses were ill-lit, undrained, with the gutter water splashing the threshold, and the eaves of the opposite houses so near that the sun could not penetrate into the street. All this may have been so, but around two-thirds of the town were gardens and fields, the neighbouring streets were full of painted shrines, metal lamps, gargoyles, pinnacles, balconies of hand-forged iron or hand-carved stone, solid doors, bronzed gates, richly-coloured frescoes; and the eyes and the hearts of the dwellers in them had wherewithal to feed on with pleasure, not to speak of the constant stream of many-coloured costume and of varied pageant or procession which was for ever passing through them. Then in the niches there were figures; at the corners there were shrines; on the rivers there were beautiful carved bridges, of which

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examples are still left to our day in the Rialto and the Vecchio. There were barges with picture-illumined sails, and pleasure-galleys gay to the sights, and everywhere there were towers and spires, and crenulated walls, and the sculptured fronts of houses and churches and monasteries, and close at hand was the greenness of wood and meadow, the freshness of the unsullied country. Think only what that meant; no miles on miles of dreary suburban waste to travel; no pert aggressive modern villas to make day hateful; no underground railway stations and subways; no hissing steam, no grinding and shrieking cable trams; no hell of factory smoke and jerry-builders' lath and plaster; no glaring geometrical flower beds; but the natural country running, like a happy child laden with posies, right up to the walls of the town.

The cobbler or craftsman, who sat and worked in his doorway, and saw the whole vari-coloured life of a mediæval city pass by him, was a very different being to the modern mechanic, a cypher amongst hundreds, shut in a factory room, amongst the deafening noise of cogwheel and pistons. Even from a practical view of his position, his guilds were a very much finer organisation than modern trades-unions, and did far more for him in his body and his mind. In the exercise of his labour he could then be individual and original, he is now but one-thousandth part of an inch in a single tooth of a huge revolving cogwheel. The mediæval house might be in itself nothing more than a cover from bad weather, but all about it there was infinite variety; all life in the street or alley was richly coloured, even the gutter brawls were medleys

of shining steel, and broken plumes, and many-coloured coats, and broidered badges, a whirl of bright hues, which sent a painter in joy to his palette.

Indoors there were the spinning-wheel, the copper vessels, the walnut presses, the settle by the wide warm hearth, the shrine upon the stairs which the women made fresh with flowers. The river was gay with blazoned hulls and painted sails; over its bridges the processions of church or guild passed like embroidered ribbons slowly unrolling; the workman had a busy life, and often a perilous life, but one still blent with leisure; and the mariners' tales of wondrous lands unknown lent to life that witchery of the remote and unattainable, that delightful thrill of mystery and awe, which to the omniscient and cynical modern soul seem childishness too trivial for words.

Try and realise what life was like when Chaucer walked through Chepe, when Henri de Valois entered Venice, when Philippe le Bel rode through the oak woods of Vincennes, when Petrarca was crowned in Rome, when William Shakespeare sauntered through Warwickshire lanes in cowslip time. Read Michelet's description of a Flemish Burgher, and contrast it with the existence of a shopkeeper in a modern town. Read Froude's description of a sea-going merchantman of Elizabeth's days, and contrast it with the captain of a modern liner. You will at once see how full of colour and individuality were the former lives; how colourless, unlovely, and deprived of all initiative are the latter. Being shorn of freedom, interest, and beauty, modern life finds vent for the feverishness which is cooped up in it in commercial

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gambling—gambling of all kinds from the Stock Exchange to the tontine, from the foreign loan to the suburban handicap—and existence is but one gigantic lottery. Even when a man goes on an excursion of pleasure he will at starting buy a penny ticket which insures his life for a hundred pounds in case of accident! How can such a populace, always haunted by the fear of death, possibly enjoy?

The great increase in cold-blooded and ferocious murders, done on slight motive and with cynical indifference, is the natural issue of this way of looking at life. Who has no reverence for his own life has naturally none for the lives of others. When a man regards his own existence as a mere parcel to be adequately paid for with a hundred pounds, it follows as the night the day that he cannot regard the life of another as worth twenty shillings. Even death itself is made grotesque by modern science, and the arms and legs and headless trunks flung into the air by the explosion of a bomb are robbed of that mute majesty which the dead body claims by right of nature. They seem no more than shreds of cloth or fragments of chopped wood. It is to be feared, moreover, that the extreme facilities given by science for instantaneous and widespread slaughter will lead gradually to greater indifference still in the public mind to assassination, and it will become so common that it will be scarcely regarded with disapproval.

Many verdicts in various countries show the growing indulgence of the law to murders. In France and Italy especially even a cold-blooded murder will meet scant punishment, whilst one due to sudden

passion is almost sure of being either wholly unpunished, or very lightly sentenced. In many cases, even in England, the juries have been of an extraordinary tenderness towards murderers whose guilt they were obliged to admit. At Chester, in England, a few weeks ago, four young colliers who set on and stoned another to death, and flung his body in a canal, were sentenced by Mr Justice Lawrance to the punishment of four months in prison for three of them, and nine months for the ringleader, and nothing more.

Many men of violent temper would think so small a price well paid to rid themselves of a foe or of a rival. The excuse for the colliers was that they had all been drinking. This is an excuse very generally made in these days of culture and compulsory education.

It will be said that this has nothing to do with the presence or absence of beauty in national life. But it has much to do with the callousness and apathy and egotism so general in national life; and the ugliness of surrounding influences and poverty of design in the arts so common in modern times are chief factors in generating this lamentable temper.

Happiness, and its companions goodwill and kindly sympathy, are insensibly suggested and increased by what is beautiful, artistic, and full of good colour and varied design. Even the physical aspect of man is affected by that which it looks upon, that by which it is surrounded, and the French woman was a wise mother who during her pregnancy went to gaze upon the finest works of the Louvre. How much, on the contrary, may the embryo be affected for ill by sordid,

dreary, and unlovely conditions which environ the parent during the period of gestation?

There can be, I think, no doubt that physical beauty is degenerating rapidly, and the frequency with which the scrofulous mouth is seen in children, even in children of the aristocracies, is alarming for the future of the race. In the working classes the offspring must be fatally affected by the poisonous trades, the sickening effluvia, the deadly conditions amongst which modern commerce requires its slaves to spend their lives.

Even the country fields are sullied by chemicals and stink of sulphates, phosphates, and human excrements. Agriculture tends to become a mere manufacture, like any other, surrounded by the din of pistons, the fumes of vapour, the jar of wheels.

Beauty is the safest stimulant, the surest tonic, the most precious inspiration; natural beauty first of all, and the beauty of the arts closely following, twinlike handmaids to Aphrodite. But to perceive this the mentally blind are as incapable as the physically blind; and such, mental cecity is as general in these days as myopy is common in the schoolrooms of this generation.

Every year all cities, and even all towns, are severed farther and farther from the country; every year the electric wires multiply for telegraph and telephone; the tramways and railways increase, the sickening grinding noises common to these methods of locomotion fill the air, and the extraordinary ugliness, which seems attached like a doom to any modern invention, is multiplied on all sides. That, in an age which considers itself educated, such hideous construc-

tions as the great wheels of Chicago and of Earl's Court should attract sane persons as a diversion will alone prove how completely the instinct of correct taste, with its accompanying abhorrence of deformity, has become extinct in all modern crowds.

With the ever-increasing use of steam, the beauty of the sky yearly grows dimmer and more veiled. That a race with any pretensions to education and perception can live contentedly under such a sky as that of London would appear an incredible fact, did we not know that it is an indisputable one. Whoever revisits Paris after a few seasons' absence finds the brilliancy of its life more and more dimmed with every decade by the sullying of the atmosphere through the increase of factories, railways and other works, and the invasion by the town of its once beautiful girdle of wood, orchard, and garden. Every year national life everywhere grows less varied, less picturesque, more unlovely, and every year finds the people more contented to dwell with no other horizon than a bank of smoke.

It was monstrous that the selection of the glades and pastures of the New Forest, for military manœuvres, should ever have been permitted by the British War Office. But the mere fact that it *was* monstrous, that it was an offence to history and nature, that it disturbed and distressed wild life, that it wounded and outraged the feelings of residents and the sentiments of artists, was a reason all-sufficient to make the modern temper brutally enamoured of the idea. Merely because the despatch of the battalions and field batteries thither was a vandalism, and caused pain

to more æsthetic minds, military manœuvres in the New Forest became all at once a project to be insisted on and carried out at all costs. The same outrage is now being done to Stonehenge.

The modern temper cannot respect, cannot appreciate, cannot love, but it can hate; and its hatred shows itself in damage and destruction everywhere, whether it set fire to the noble old house of the Hanseatic League at Antwerp, pull down the water towers of Dieppe, plant the jerry-builder before the Lateran, drag a railway train up to Murren, or trample down with ill-shod boy-soldiers the thyme and the bracken of the Conqueor's woods and the turf which the Druids trod.

The modern temper resembles those children in Victor Hugo's romance who, being left alone with the beautiful and ancient *Horæ*, find no prank so delightful as to tear from end to end the illuminated text of the book and its perfect miniatures, clapping their hands as each fair thing perishes. Nor is there any indication of the advent of anyone who will take the book of the world from the destroying hands, and save what still remains of its beauty.

There is, on the contrary, every sign that the future will see a still greater domination of that rude, cold, and cruel temper which takes pleasure in innovation and obliteration, and sneers, with contemptuous conceit, at those who are pained by such acts of desecration. It is the same sneer, the same leering and self-satisfied snigger, with which it views the expression and evidence of pity for, and solidarity with, what it is pleased to call the lower animals.

The Langdale Pikes are being pierced and blasted for iron foundries and slate quarries. The great forest of La Haye near Nancy is being destroyed by military fortifications, and by foundries and by factories. All the valley of the Meuse and the Moselle is sullied with factory smoke and blasting powder. The Bay of Amalfi and the shore of Posilippo are defiled by cannon foundries. The Isle of St Elena at Venice is laid waste to serve as a railway factory. All the Ardennes are scorched and soiled, and sickened with stench of smoke and suffocating slag. The Peak Country and the Derwent vales are being scarred and charred for railway lines, mines, and factories. Amsterdam, so late the Venice of the North, is becoming an unmeaning mass of modern insignificance and ugliness; what has been done to the Venice of the South is such outrage that it might wake Tiziano from under his weight of marble in the Frari Church, and call the Veronese from his grave.

To destroy Trinity Hospital in London, and place a brewery in its place is a joy and glory to the modern municipal soul. The Hôtel Dessin in Calais, made sacred to the name of Laurence Sterne, was a pleasant place with an arched entrance and a large courtyard, round whose sides the buildings were grouped; it had vines and greenery of all kinds, and over the archway were little dormer windows. Behind it stretched fair gardens of great extent, and beyond these was a theatre belonging to the hotel. Of late years it had served as a museum for the town, and was thus preserved intact; now it has been pulled down and razed

to the ground, and a huge commercial school built in its place. The funicular railways are ruining the whole of the Swiss Alps; the greed of a few speculators and the irreverent folly of the multitude combine to scar the sides of the great mountains and gather on their summits troops of gaping sightseers, to whom the solemnity of the Gletsch Alp or the virginity of the Jungfrau are of no account.

Zermatt, so late a virgin stronghold of the Higher Alps, is now a mere cockney excursion, and sixty thousand trippers invade its solitude with every summer, plodding like camels in a string, vexing the air with inane noises, offending the mountain stillness with songs to which the bray of mules were music, insulting the crystal clearness of the heavens with the intrusion of their own ludicrous, blatant and imbecile personalities, incapable even of being silent and ashamed. The island of Naxos, whose mere name brings before us so many classic memories in all their loveliness and glory, is being broken up into chips by the emery-workers, and is to be mined for aluminium.

The finest torrent in Scotland is about to be diverted from its course and used for aluminium works. The glory of its waters is to be known no more, merely that some engineers and manufacturers may fill their pockets to the public loss; that some promoters and shareholders, possessing large parliamentary influence, may add to their fortunes. To speak of civilisation, which is a term implying culture, in the same breath with a nation capable of such an action is ludicrous.

The fumes of these aluminium works will, when

they are in full blast, emit hydrofluoric acid gas which will destroy all the vegetation on Loch Ness for miles. Yet such is the apathy and want of conscience in modern generations that the annihilation of the Falls of Foyers appears scarcely to meet with any general indignation.

There is no modern mania so dangerous as the present one for meddling with water; no injury more conspicuous and irrevocable than the perpetual interference with lake and stream and torrent.

The lakes of Maggiore, of Como, of Garda, are all being defiled by factories and steam-engines; and even such a writer as De Vogüé can look contentedly forward to a time when such erections will disfigure both banks of the Rhône.

The isles of Lake Leman serve for commercial and communal purposes. Thirlmere and Loch Katrine have been violated, and all the other English and Scotch lakes will be similarly ravaged. Fucina has been dried up as a speculation, and Trasimene is threatened. The Rhône is already dammed up, and tapped, and tortured, until all its rich alluvial deposits are lost to the soil of Provence.

It would be easy to fill folios with the bare enumeration of places and memories, of sites and scenes of which the destruction has been accomplished within the last few years. To get money for the preservation of anything is well-nigh impossible; but millions flow like water when there is any scheme of destruction. In an age which prates more than any other of its pride in education, the violation of every law of taste, of every tie of association, of every rule of

beauty, is always greedily welcomed with a barbaric shout of triumph.

Lath and plaster circuses or theatres are erected by the Mausoleum of Hadrian, and the miserable caged monkeys of a menagerie pull each other's tails where Raffaele's pavillon stood amidst the nightingale-filled ilex groves.

Frederic Harrison, in his admirable studies of Paris, cannot hide from himself or his readers the loss to art and history which the Haussmannising of the city began, the insanity of the Commune continued, and the barbarism of the present Republic confirms. The ruin of Rome since the Italian occupation is ten times worse and more offensive than even such ruin as would have been entailed by a siege, for it is more vulgar; shell and shot would have destroyed indeed, but they would not have imbecilely and impudently reconstructed. The same sad change awaits, if it has not already overtaken, every city of Europe, and alas! even of Asia. The smoke fiend has entered Jerusalem, and the shriek of the engines has scared the wild dove from her nest in the palm and pomegranate. The Mount of Olives is 'a thing to be done,' and the 'scorcher,' sweating and grinning, drives his wheel through the rose-thickets of Damascus.

Factory chimneys stand as thick in Bombay as in Birmingham, and black trails of foul vapour float over Indus and Ganges; soon their curse will reach the Euphrates. I believe I am correct in saying that the smoke from the funnel of a great steamer or a large factory can be traced for forty-five miles in its passage through the air. Imagine the effect on atmosphere

of the continual crossing and re-crossing on ocean routes of tens of thousands of such steamships yearly, of the perpetual belching of such fumes from the innumerable factory shafts annually increased in every part of what is called the civilised world. To India, from England alone, the export of machines and other material for factory erection has been at the enormous rate of £70,000 monthly!

The Ugliness of Modern Life

Only let us consider what this means, what destruction of pure light and of fine atmosphere this involves for Hindostan.

The snow-white marbles of the temples, the ivory doors, the silver gates, the rosy clouds, the lotus-laden waters, the golden dawns, the magnolia woods, the camellia groves, the feathered flocks in the bamboo aisles, will all vanish that the smoke fiend may reign alone and the traders who live by him grow rich. The 'light of Asia' is forced to grow foul and dark and sickly, and its radiant suns to be shrouded in pestilent fog in order that the British Gradgrind may put by his 200 per cent. and fold his hands complacently on his rotund belly.

Is the end worth the means?

Is modern trade in truth such a godhead descended on earth that all the loveliness of earth and air, of sky and water should be sacrificed to its demands?

We hear *ad nauseam* of the gains of modern life, of what is called civilisation: does no one count its losses? It might be well to do so. It might act as a corrective to the inane self-worship which is at once the most ill-founded and the most irritating feature of the age. Perhaps other ages have in turn adored

themselves in like manner, but there is not in history any record of it. Its prophets, heroes, sages, each age has either admired or execrated; but I do not think any age has so admired itself as the present age, which has its prototype in William of Germany standing between two sand banks and thinking himself greater than Alexander because his engineers have succeeded in cutting for him a ditch longer than usual.

The modern world is at this moment ruled by two enemies of all beauty: these are commerce and militarism. What the one does not destroy, the other tramples under foot. In earlier times war, terrible always, was beautiful, like its goddess Bellona, in its savage splendour. Its camps, its troops, its standards, its panoply, were all full of colour and of pomp. Even so late as the Napoleonic wars its awfulness was blended with beauty. Now the passage of an army is like the course of so many dirty luggage trains filled with bales of wool or hampers of fish. Its monstrous maw licks up all loveliness as all life which it finds in its way. Its frightful steel cylinders belch death on every gracious and happy thing. It is unenlivened by pageantry, as it is unredeemed by courtesy. Bellona is no more a goddess, but a hag.

Socialism, which has the future of the world in its hands, will probably be unable to abolish war, and will certainly not care for beauty or seek to preserve it. The reconstruction of society which Socialism contemplates will not be a state of things in which the interests of either nature or art will be cherished. Collectivism must of necessity be colourless; equality can afford none of those heights and depths, those

lights and shades, which are the essential charm of life as of landscape. When all the arable earth is one huge allotment-ground, a Corot will find no subject for his canvas, not even in his dreams, for his dreams will be dead of inanition.

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There can be, I think, no hope that this loss of beauty will not be greater and greater with every year. The tendency, continually increasing in the modern character, is to regard beauty and nature with cynical indifference, stirred, when stirred at all, into active insolence; such insolence as was expressed in the joke of the Chicago citizen who called the plank-walks of his city 'the reafforesting of our town.' It is a temper not merely brutal, but with a leer in it which is more offensive than its brutality.

The great beauty which animal and bird life lends to the earth is doomed to lessen and disappear. The automatic vehicle will render the horse useless; and he will be considered too costly, and too slow, to be kept even as a gambling toy. The dog will have no place in a world which has no gratitude for such simple sincerity and faithful friendliness as he offers. When wool, and horn, and leather, and meat foods have been replaced by chemical inventions, cattle and sheep will have no more tolerance than the wild buffalo has had in the United States. What are now classed as big game will be exterminated in Asia and Africa, and already in Europe we are told that the pleasure it affords to people to kill them is the sole reason why stags, foxes, and gamebirds are allowed to exist and multiply under artificial protection. All the charm which the races of 'fur

and feather' lend to the earth will be lost for ever; for a type destroyed can never be recalled.

Every invention of what is called science takes the human race farther and farther from nature, nearer and nearer to an artificial, unnatural and dependent state. One seems to hear the laugh of Goethe's Mephistopheles behind the hiss of steam; and in the tinkle of the electric bell there lurks the chuckle of glee with which the Tempter sees the human fools take as a boon and a triumph the fatal gifts he has given.

What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What shall it profit the world to put a girdle about its loins in forty minutes when it shall have become a desert of stone, a wilderness of streets, a treeless waste, a songless city, where man shall have destroyed all life except his own, and can hear no echo of his heart's pulsation save in the throb of an iron piston.

The engine tearing through the disembowelled mountain, the iron and steel houses towering against a polluted sky, the huge cylinders generating electricity and gas, the network of wires cutting across the poisoned air, the overgrown cities spreading like scurvy, devouring every green thing like locusts; haste instead of leisure, Neurasthenia instead of health, mania instead of sanity, egotism and terror instead of courage and generosity, these are the gifts which the modern mind creates for the world. It can chemically imitate every kind of food and drink, it can artificially produce every form of disease and suffering, it can carry death in a needle and

annihilation in an odour, it can cross an ocean in five days, it can imprison the human voice in a box, it can make a dead man speak from a paper cylinder, it can transmit thoughts over hundreds of miles of wire, it can turn a handle and discharge scores of death-dealing tubes at one moment as easily as a child can play a tune on a barrel organ, it can pack death and horror up in a small tin case which has served for sardines or potted herrings, and leave it on a window-sill, and cause by it towers to fall, and palaces to crumble, and flames to upleap to heaven, and living men to change to calcined corpses; all this it can do, and much more. But it cannot give back to the earth, or to the soul, 'the sweet wild freshness of morning.' And when all is said of its great inventions and their marvels and mysteries, are they more marvellous or more mysterious than the changes of chrysalis and caterpillar and butterfly, or the rise of the giant oak from the tiny acorn, or the flight of swallow and nightingale over ocean and continent?

Man has created for himself in the iron beast a greater tyrant than any Nero or Caligula. And what is the human child of the iron beast, what is the typical, notable, most conspicuous creation of the iron beast's epoch?

It is the Cad, vomited forth from every city and town in hundreds, thousands, millions, with every holy day and holy-day. The chief creation of modern life is the Cad; he is an exclusively modern manufacture, and it may safely be said that the poorest slave in Hellas, the meanest fellah in Egypt, the humblest

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pariah in Asia was a gentleman beside him. The Cad is the entire epitome, the complete blossom and fruit in one, of what we are told is an age of culture. Behold him in the vélodrome as he yells insanely after his kind as they tear along on their tandem machines in a match, and then ask yourself candidly, O my reader, if any age before this in all the centuries of earth ever produced any creature so utterly low and loathsome, so physically, mentally, individually, and collectively hideous? The helot of Greece, the gladiator of Rome, the swash-buckler of Mediæval Europe, nay, the mere pimp and pander of Elizabethan England, of the France of the Valois, of the Spain of Velasquez, were dignity, purity, courage in person beside the Cad of this breaking dawn of the twentieth century; the Cad rushing on with his shrill scream of laughter as he knocks down the feeble woman or the yearling child, and making life and death and all eternity seem ridiculous by the mere existence of his own intolerable fatuity and bestiality.

XI

THE QUALITY OF MERCY

The Quality of Mercy

WHATEVER we may think of the artistic and critical influence of Mr Ruskin on his age, we cannot but view with admiration and reverence much of his moral teaching, and there are in his writings innumerable isolated words of wisdom which would be well printed in letters of gold wherever men and women congregate and youth is educated. Amongst these is one which could not be too often reproduced before the eyes of an indifferent, egotistic, and cynical generation. It is this: 'Whosoever is not actively kind, is cruel.' It is an absolute truth, but one which is very little heeded.

I will not here speak of the three crystallised and applauded forms of cruelty, war, sport, and scientific experiment. I wish to speak only of what is by scientists termed 'lay' cruelty, but which I would myself call general and scarcely conscious cruelty—the ill-treatment of all sentient creatures not human, by human creatures, due to the apathy, egotism, and unkindness of the latter. It is to this form of cruelty that Mr Ruskin alludes in the sentence previously quoted.

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The cruelty of earlier times had its chief cause in violence; the cruelty of modern times has its chief cause in cowardice and selfishness. The character of the cruelty has altered, but its prevalence remains equally widespread and its motive is more contemptible. The modern world regards the pillory and the stocks as barbarous; but it allows the railway signalman to be riveted to his post for eighteen consecutive hours, and sees no harm in it. The human race was then ruder, no doubt, but more generous; more violent in some ways, but more magnanimous. Remember the familiar story of the Roman who wrung the neck of the dove which took refuge in his bosom from the pursuing bird of prey, and was stoned by his fellow-citizens. In the modern world there would be no movement of indignation against such an act; gentlewomen and men see the necks wrung of the wounded birds in the shooting enclosures from Hurlingham to Monte Carlo without the slightest emotion of pity or effort at censure.

Not long ago I spoke of this to a young and beautiful Englishwoman of the great world, and she answered, 'Yes, it is useless to attempt to move them to any feeling for animals. You can get them to do something for people, because they think it does them good with the masses, keeps off revolution, and helps in canvassing. But for cruelty they do not care in the least.' She spoke in simplicity, with no intention of sarcasm, but she could not have uttered a greater truth, or a more cutting satire.

There are exceptions, doubtless, but they are not numerous enough to leaven the great mass of indifferent

and selfish people. Animals find but few friends. Alas ! they have no votes !

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There is, perhaps, one thing still more nauseating than the world's apathy, and that is its self-praise ; its admiration of its own charities, so miserably insignificant beside the extravagance of its own pleasures. When we think how little is done by those who could do so much to influence even their own households to justice and tenderness, one cannot wonder that the populace is unmoved by the occasional invitation to them from a higher world to display those virtues which the rich prefer rather to inculcate than to practise.

Last year in England, in a nobleman's house, a footman beat a small dog, which ran into the offices, with a red-hot poker, and piled burning coals on it until it died in indescribable agony. I wrote and asked the nobleman in question if he had dismissed this monster from his service, the man having been only punished by the Bench with a slight fine ; the nobleman answered me so evasively that it was easy to read between the lines and see that he had retained the footman in his service. This act on the part of the servant was an extreme case of hideous cruelty, but his employer's condonation is by no means an extreme case ; it is, indeed, a very common sample of a master's indifference, of that indifference which is practically connivance. People abandon their stables to their coachmen, their dogs to their keepers ; even the animals they call pets are frequently allowed to suffer from servants, or children, and are bullied, neglected, and teased with impunity.

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The disgusting spectacle of dog-catching by the police is allowed to be presented in the public streets of most capitals of Europe, continually; and there is never the outburst of revolted feeling which such an offence to all humane sentiment and common decency should provoke. If such spectacles excited in the general public one-thousandth part of such disgust as they would excite in any really civilised people, it would be impossible for such scenes to exist, in either hemisphere, to shock the sight and sense of those of more refined taste and more humane feelings.

There is an excellent association for the protection of birds, but its aims are so little in touch with its generation that it obtains only the most meagre support. Great names and patrician names are very rare upon its lists, and at its public meetings its cause has its neck at once broken by the question of sport being rigorously excluded by its chairman, who is a noted sportsman!

There is an institution in London which calls itself a 'home for lost dogs'; under this affecting title it appeals for funds, as though it were inspired solely by love and anxiety for the happiness of dogs, and for the protection and prolongation of their lives. In reality it is an institution for the organised suffocation of fifteen or twenty thousand dogs annually, which have been kidnapped by the police and taken forcibly from their owners; it is a slaughter-house for the assistance and convenience of the police, and as such should be maintained out of the funds of the Government. Nothing but the most criminal apathy in the public could permit a slaughter-house to masquerade as a

'Home' and be a petitioner to charity. The word 'home' implies peace and safety, and should not be permitted to cover a place of legalised butchery.

Think how odious to the horse must be the mere forcing of the bit into his mouth and of the headstall over his ears. Without speaking of the torture of the spur, the stinging of the lash, the dreadful weight upon the spine from which the riding-horse suffers, and the dreadful strain upon the lungs and withers to which the draught and driving-horse is incessantly condemned, only realise the continued imprisonment and galling servitude in which the equine race are forced to dwell, and ask yourself if, in common pity or justice, that life should not be as much alleviated and lightened as it is possible to make it. Yet is there one owner of horses in a million who takes the trouble to see for himself how his own stables are organised, or maintains out of gratitude, in their old age or in their failing speed, the horses which have served him in their prime?

Many wild-beast shows of the present hour are as cruel as were the gladiatorial games of Rome, and far less manly. I can imagine no possible argument which can be put forward for the license awarded to the travelling caravans which attend fairs and feasts all the world over, and which are hells of animal torture. What is called the taming of beasts is the most cruel, demoralising, and loathsome of pursuits; the horrible wickedness of its methods is known to all, and the appetite it awakens and stimulates in the public is to the last degree debasing. Yet not the smallest effort is made to end it.

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The encouragement of menageries, where wild animals are cowed and maltreated into trembling misery and forced to imitate the foolish attitudes and comedies of men, lies entirely with the public, *i.e.*, with the world at large. If the nations were in any true sense civilised, such forms of diversion would, I repeat, be insupportable to them. Dancing dogs, dancing bears, performing wolves, enslaved elephants, would one and all, from the lion tortured on a bicycle in a circus, to the little guinea-pig playing a drum in the streets, be so sickeningly painful to a truly civilised public that the stolid human brutes who live by their sufferings would not dare to train and exhibit them.

Not long ago there was a somewhat silly discussion in the English press on the effect of perfumes on desert animals in captivity, of the excitement and pleasure produced on them by such odours. It occurred to no one of the sapient correspondents that such perfumes did, no doubt, recall to the poor imprisoned animals the intense fragrance of the flowers in their own jungles and tropical forests. All animals are intensely sensitive to odours, because their olfactory nerves telegraph to their brains in a way of which our own dull nostrils are utterly unconscious.

With what pretension can a world call itself humane when in its codes all 'wild' animals are unprotected by laws, and may be treated with whatever brutality is desired? When it is a question for the dweller in a jungle to kill a wild beast or be killed himself, one can understand that he chooses the first of the two alternatives. But this is no excuse for the man in

cities to drag a captured lion to make the sport of fools, and to perish wretchedly of diseased joints, thwarted longings, and the anguish of nostalgia.

It is idle to speak of the civilisation of a world in which such things are possible. From a hygienic point of view alone, these poor tormented creatures, cooped up in filthy cages, breathing fetid air night and day, hearing each other's piteous cries, having no single want or instinct gratified, ill-fed, diseased, miserable, and ravaged by parasites, must be one of the most unwholesome centres of contagion conceivable. A polar bear is at this moment being taken through Europe for exhibition in a caravan; he is kept in a cage in which he cannot turn; he has a pan of water two inches deep, and a few ounces of bread as his only food!

There is no animal which is not to be attached by kindness and justice shown to him. The lion of Rosa Bonheur fell into decline from grief at being sent from her keeping to that of the Jardin des Plantes when she was absent on a distant voyage. She returned to find him dying; he recognised her voice and opened his eyes with a feeble roar of pleasure, then laid his great head down upon her knees and died. No one who knows human nature by long experience can assert for a moment that its fidelity can be secured by benefits, or its sincerity insured by affection; but when kindness and regard are shown to 'the beasts which perish,' these never fail to give them back tenfold.

Let me here tell a true history, which I should have told to Matthew Arnold had he been living then, with entire certainty of his sympathy.

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A little dog of Maltese breed, who belonged to my mother, was inconsolable at her death. For three weeks he refused all food, and was kept alive by nourishment artificially administered. He sat up, and begged, day after day, before her bed and before her favourite chair, until he dropped from sheer exhaustion. He wanted for nothing that I could give him; and no habit of his daily life was changed; but he was unhappy. Whenever the door opened he thought she entered. He ran and looked into every stranger's face. He knew everything which had belonged to her. His sorrow injured his health; his heart became weak, and he died of cardiac paralysis at six years old.

What could human affection offer superior in fidelity and feeling?

> 'That loving heart, that patient soul,
> Had they indeed no longer span
> To run their course, and reach their goal,
> And read their homily to man?'

I think that not only is their affection undervalued, but that the intelligence of animals is greatly underrated. Man having but one conception of intelligence, his own, does not endeavour to comprehend another which is different, and differently exhibited and expressed. I have before now said in print that if our mind exceeds the mind of animals and birds in much, theirs exceeds ours at least in some things, as their sight, scent, and hearing far surpass ours.

When we remember also that these other races are absolutely alone, are never aided by man, are only, on

the contrary, hindered by him, opposed, thwarted, and persecuted by him, their achievements are, relatively to their opportunities, much more wonderful than any of his. The elements which are his great foes are likewise theirs; they have to encounter and suffer all the woes of tempest, hurricane, flood, the width of barren seas, the hunger on solitary shores; and they have also in his ruthless and unceasing spite an enemy more cruel than any with which he himself has to contend. If we meditate on this unquestionable fact, we shall be forced to admit that Cristoforo Colombo was not a greater hero than many a little swallow.

But scarcely anyone does meditate on these marvels; one in a million, one in a generation, at the most. To nearly the whole of humanity the wonderful and beautiful races with which the world teems, which are for ever living side by side with the human, do not exist except in so far as they contribute to the pleasure of slaughter, or the greed of commerce, or of gambling. For to the majority of men and women all organisms except their own are as though they were not.

There is no sympathy with these interesting and mysterious lives led side by side with man, but ignored by him entirely, except when by him persecuted. The nest of the weaver bird is to the full as ingenious and as marvellous as the dome of St Peter's or St Paul's. The beaver State, and the bee State, are as intricate in organisation as the Constitution of the French Republic, and the British Monarchy, and are distinctly superior in many parts of their organisation to either of these. The passage of the white ants through a

jungle and across a continent is quite as admirable in unison and skill and order as the human march to Chitral; and the annual flights of the storks, of the Solan geese, of the wild ducks, exhibit qualities of obedience to a chosen commander, of endurance, of observation, and of wisdom, not exceeded by any human Arctic or Australian exploring party.

The vainglorious assumption that we have a monopoly of what is called reason cannot be allowed by those who bring a reason of their own, unbiassed, to the study of animals, not under the unnatural conditions of the laboratory, but in natural freedom and peace.

No skill of a Stanley or a Nansen ever exceeded that of the hound Maida in tracing Sir Walter Scott, and no journey of a Burton or a Speke was ever so wonderful as the migratory voyage of a martin or a nightingale. I have said this ere now; and it can never be repeated too often, for nothing is so cruel as the vanity of man, and nothing so opposed to his own true progress as his blind and dogged contempt for all races not shaped exactly like his own.

The correspondence which has been general in the English press regarding the muzzling of dogs, has been conspicuous for its silliness, ignorance, and cruelty, but above all by its disgusting selfishness; and an editor of a very popular organ was not ashamed to print that if only one human life could be saved, etc., etc., disregarding the fact that men were at the time being slaughtered by dysentery and fever, by the scores, for no better object than to go and cut down cotton trees at Coomassie; whilst deaths by starvation, a perfectly

preventible cause, are so common in English cities that the reports of them scarcely awaken a passing regret or compassion. The veneration for human life which is developed by journalists when a lion kills his gaoler, or when a dog is supposed to have been the cause of his tormentor's death, is comical in these gentlemen of the press, who, to help a speculation, open out a new mart, or influence the share lists, will ravenously demand a military expedition, or a naval demonstration, to sabre, shell, burn, and ravage upon distant strands.

The attitude of the Brahmin, to whom all forms of life are sacred, is intelligible, estimable, and consistent; the attitude of the savage conqueror, to whom thousands of dead men and thousands of dead beasts are alike so much carrion, is intelligible and reasonable, whilst brutal. The attitude of the journalist and county councilman is not either; it possesses neither logic nor common sense, and is not estimable or reasonable, but only contemptible.

If there be one thing more loathsome than the carnage of war, it is the Red Cross societies following in its train. But the modern world, being conscious that the butchery of war ill accords with its æsthetic and religious pretensions, gives a sop to its conscience by sending the ambulance side by side with the gun carriage. A more robust and more honest temper did not evade the truth that the least brutal war is the one most immediately and conclusively destructive; the slaughter of wounded men was more truly merciful than the modern system of surgery and nursing, which saves shattered constitutions and ruined health

to drag out a miserable and artificially prolonged existence.

There is, however, something which the ordinary human mind finds soothing and delightful in this formula of 'the sanctity of human life,' when combined with a corresponding disregard for human and for all other life. The good Christian likes to be raised aloft, in his own eyes, from all those other races which he imagines were given to him for his use and abuse by a gracious Deity. He loves to think that both God and the neighbouring policeman are watching over him; and taking care alike of his soul and of his great-coat. In the enormous vanity of the Christian who believes all the laws of the universe altered for him, or in the equally enormous vanity of the scientist who arrogates to himself the right to dogmatise on the mysteries of creation, this attitude is not surprising. But in either the philosophic mind; or the poetic temperament, it is so because to the philosopher the difference between the human and the other races cannot appear very great, whilst to the poet the solidarity of all sentient life must always seem unquestionable. That friend, and scholar, and poet for whom I mourn as freshly as though he had died but yesterday did not disdain to greet a brother's spirit in

> 'That liquid, melancholy eye
> From whose pathetic, soul-fed springs
> Seem'd surging the Virgilian cry,
> The sense of tears in mortal things,'

for these lines were written by Matthew Arnold to 'only a dog.'

It is not in foolishly endeavouring to make animals our prisoners and puppets, in trying to force them to count, to caper, or to play cards, that we reach insight into their natures and their minds. It is in loving them and respecting them as he loved and respected Geist and Kai. I use the latter word advisedly, for whoever does not in a fair degree, as with a human friend, respect the freedom, the preference, and the idiosyncrasy of an animal will never reach true comprehension of him.

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A writer wrote the other day, 'People speak of the law of nature; but who feels it? There is no such emotion known in the ordinary life of the world.' The persons who will let their dinner wait whilst they watch a sunset fade over sea or moor, or who will leave the share list unread to see the morning dew make silver globes of the gossamer in the grass, are so few that they may almost be said not to exist, if we except a poet here, an artist there; and the sense of kinship with races not human can only come to those whose own kinship with earth and air and sky is strong enough to resist the dulling and debasing influences of artificial life, of life amongst men and their trivialities, frauds, and vanities.

'The sun is God,' said Turner, when he lay dying, and, alas! saw that sun only through the mists of London. But how many see the sun at all, even when they live where it is most radiant? How many think of the sun during the long day it illumines? The light is taken as a matter of course, as our breath is drawn through our lungs. There is no gratitude for it.

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In similar manner there is no sense of kinship with the winged children of the air, with the four-footed dwellers beside us on the earth. Almost the only recognition we give them is maltreatment. At other times the indifference of our unspeakable fatuity rises in a dust cloud between us and them. Of gratitude for their companionship, their aid, their patience, their many virtues, there is not a trace in those who use them and abuse them, no more than there is gratitude for the beauty of the rose or the fragrance of the violet.

As 'the winds of March take the world with beauty,' every pasture and coppice is full of blossom, passed unnoticed by thousands in every daily country walk; so in the same manner do the multitudes trample down, and pass by, the ineffable charm and fragrance of disregarded affections, and unappreciated qualities, in the other races of earth.

Hang a poor woodland bird in a cage, if you can bear to look on such a captive, above a blossoming honeysuckle or hawthorn, and note his anguish of remembrance, his ecstasy of hope, his frantic effort to be free. But the accursed wires are between him and the familiar blossoms, between him and the blue sky; in a little while he realises that he is a prisoner; the fluttering joy goes out of his heart and his wings; his feathers grow ruffled and dull, his eyes are veiled, he sits motionless and heartbroken, and the breeze of the springtime blows past him, and never more will bear him on its buoyant way.

Living wild song-birds are sold at a halfpenny each by thousands in the London slums, and as many more

die—nay, thrice as many more—before they reach the streets, packed close and jammed together in hampers and crates.

Yet the English Home Secretary, on being asked by a deputation to put an end to this abominable traffic, answered that it was desirable to do as little as possible in the way of legislation!

For legislators, always eager to make cruel and coercive laws, prefer to let humane ones be substituted by what they call 'the gradual education of the people.' But this gradual education is so extremely gradual that its progress is imperceptible; it may even be justly suspected that it is chiefly a backward movement; and such education, as far as education by example goes, is hindered, not helped, by what are called the cultured classes.

In this, our own present day, bull fights become at once popular wherever they are allowed, and with women as much so as with men, and I am certain that if the gladiatorial shows of Imperial Rome were introduced at Olympia the London crowds would in the main be delighted with them, and the London women would eagerly turn down their thumbs.

Why not? They go to see the tight-rope walking and the trapeze jump at the Crystal Palace and the Aquarium; and the only possible attraction in these is the probability that in each case the performers will be killed one day; apart from this chance there is no interest whatever in the spectacle. If the authorities were induced to permit them, gladiatorial shows would become so popular with the women of Belgravia and Mayfair that no one would care for anything less

exciting, and the Oxford and Cambridge sports would be deserted with contempt as offering no attraction.

The desire for excitement is the most conspicuous feature, and the most dangerous disease of the age; anything which provides it is welcome; people are bored despite their incessant search of distraction, and anything which will exorcise the spectre of boredom is eagerly received; and after all it would be absurd if persons who go to see steeplechases pretended to be too squeamish to cry the 'Habet'! Let the managers of Olympia obtain permission for gladiatorial games (death being guaranteed), and I will promise them that "all London" in the most fashionable sense of those words will crowd from April to August to see the sport.

If the ladies could be allowed to descend into the arena, to touch the dying bodies, as Nero used to like to do, to see the faint life still lingering shrink and writhe, this success would be still greater; and Nero was but a primitive creature, he had but a heated iron wand, whereas my ladies could be provided by their favourite scientist with the much more excruciating torment of electricity. Imagine what exquisite little jewelled instruments of torture, made to fasten on to a bracelet, or hide within a ring, would fill the shops in Bond Street and Piccadilly. 'We are going electrolysing!' would be heard from all the pretty lips of the leaders of society; and they would cease to care for their bicycles, and auto-cars, and even for the discussion of actresses' new gowns. 'How many dead 'uns did you knock off last night?' their most intimate friend would ask, as he would lean over the rails in Rotten Row, sucking the crook of his cane.

Does this appear exaggerated and libellous?[1] Well, Let us look at the example given by a London leader of fashion and politics as she goes down at election time to shed sweetness and light around her in Poplar or Shoreditch. *The Quality of Mercy*

In her bonnet is, of course, an osprey aigrette; she knows it was torn from a living creature, but then that was done far away in some Asiatic or American creek or forest, and so really does not matter. Her Suède gloves fit like her skin; they were the skin of a kid, and were probably stripped from its living body as this lends suppleness to the skin. The jacket she carries on her arm is lined with Astrakhan fur, which was taken from an unborn lamb to give to the fur that curl and kink which please her; it has been cut from its mother's ripped-up womb. Her horses, as they wait for her at the corner of the street, have their heads fixed in air, and the muscles of their necks cramped by immovable bearing-reins. Her Japanese pug runs after her, shaking his muzzle-tortured nose. She has a telegram in her pocket which has momentarily vexed her. She sent her sable collie to the dog-exhibition at Brussels, and the excitement, or the crush, or the want of water, or something, has brought on heat apoplexy, and they wire that he is dead, poor old nervous Ossian! She really has no luck, for her Java sparrows died too at the bird show in Edinburgh, because the footman, sent with them, forgot to fill their water-glass

[1] To know how possible this is, look at the women of fashion at the Cape in this springtime of 1900, with their admirable toilettes, their lovely false hair, their bird-adorned hats, their picnics and their dinners and their cheery titter: 'Let us go and see the wounded!' *vide* the testimony of Mr Treves, the eminent surgeon.

when it got dry on the journey ; a great many people send birds to shows with nobody at all to take care of them, so she feels that she was not to blame in the very least.

'Why will you show?' says her husband, who is vexed about Ossian ; 'you don't want to win and you don't want to sell.'

'Oh, everybody does it,' she answers.

He goes into his study to console himself with a new model of a pole trap ; and she, her canvassing done, runs upstairs to see her gown for the May Drawing-Room. The train is of quite a new design, embroidered with orchids in natural colours, and fringed with the feathers of the small green parrakeet, a beautiful little bird which has been poisoned by hundreds in the jungles of New Guiana to make the border to this *manteau de cour*.

If she were told that she is a more barbaric creature than the squaw of the poor Indian trapper who poisoned the parrakeets, she would be equally astonished and offended.

Let us now look at her next-door neighbour ; he is a very wealthy person and seldom refuses a subscription, thinks private charity pernicious and pauperising, attends his church regularly, and votes in the House of Commons in favour of pigeon-shooting and spurious sports. If anyone asks him if he 'likes animals' he answers cheerily, 'Oh, dear me, yes. Poor creatures, why not?' But it does not disturb him that the horse in the hansom cab, which he has called to take him to the City, has weals all over its loins, and a bit that fills its mouth with blood and foam ; nor does he notice the

over-driven and half-starved condition of a herd of cattle being taken from Cannon Street to Smithfield, but only curses them heartily for blocking the traffic.

He eats a capon, drives behind a gelding, warms himself at a hearth of which the coal has been procured by untold sufferings of man and beast, has his fish crimped, and his lobsters scalded to death, in his kitchens, relishes the green fat cut from a living turtle, reads with approbation his head keeper's account of the last pair of owls on his estate having been successfully trapped, writes to that worthy to turn down two thousand more young pheasants for the autumn shooting, orders his agent to have his young cattle on his home-farm dishorned, and buys as a present for his daughters a card case made from the shell of a tortoise which was roasted alive, turned on its back on the fire to give the ruddy glow to its shell. Why not? His favourite preacher and his popular scientist alike assure him that all the subject races are properly sacrificed to man. It is obviously wholly impossible to convince such a person that he is cruel: he merely studies his own convenience, and he has divine and scientific authority for considering that he is perfectly right in doing so. He is quite comfortable, both for time and for eternity. It were easier to change the burglar of the slums, the brigand of the hills, than to change this self-complacent and pachydermatous householder who represents nine-tenths of the ruling classes.

Let us not mistake; he is not personally a cruel man; he would not himself hurt anything, except in sport which he thinks is legitimate, and in science which he is told is praiseworthy; he is amiable, good-natured,

perhaps benevolent, but he is wrapped up in habits, customs, facts, egotisms, tyrannies which all seem to him to be good, indeed to be essential. His horse is a thing to him like his mail phaeton; his dog is a dummy, like his umbrella stand; his cattle are wealth-producing stores, like his timber or wheat; he uses them all as he requires, as he uses his hats and gloves. He sees no more unkindness in doing away with any of them than in discarding his old boots, and he passes the most atrocious laws and by-laws for animal torment as cheerfully as he signs a cheque payable to self.

His ears are wadded by prejudice, his eyes are blinded by formula, his character is steeped in egotism; you might as well try, I repeat, to touch the heart of the Sicilian brigand or the London crib-cracker as to alter his views and opinions; you would speak to him in a language which is as unintelligible to his world as Etruscan to the philologist.

The majority of his friends, like himself, lead their short, bustling, bumptious, and frequently wholly useless lives, purblind always and entirely deaf where anything except their own interests is concerned. They think but very rarely of anything except themselves, and the competitions, ambitions, or jealousies which occupy them. But in their pastimes cruelty is to them acceptable; it is an outlet for the barbarian who sleeps in them, heavily drugged but not dead; the sight of blood titillates agreeably their own slow circulation.

Between them, and the cad who breaks the back of the bagged rabbit, there is no difference except in the degree of power to indulge the slaughter-lust.

Alas! it were easier 'to quarry the granite rock with razors' than to touch the feelings of such as this man, or this woman, where their vanities, or their mere sheep-like love of doing as others do, are in question. Princesses wear osprey tufts and lophophorus wings, and so society wears them too, and cares not a straw by what violence and wickedness they are procured; as the ladies, who attend their State concerts, sleep none the worse when in their country houses because the rabbit screams in the steel gins, and the hawk struggles in the pole trap, in the woods about their ancestral houses, and have no less appetite for luncheon amongst the bracken or the heather because shot and bleeding creatures lie half dead in the game bags around, or because the stag often is stretched in his dead majesty before their eyes. Why, then, should they care because in far distant lands little feathered creatures, lovely as flowers, innocent as the dew and the honey they feed on, are killed by the thousands and tens of thousands because a vulgar and depraved taste demands their tender bodies?

What does it matter to them that, through their demands, the bird of paradise has become so rare that, unless stringent measures be taken at once, it will be soon totally extinct, and the golden glory of its plumes will gleam no more in tropical sunlight? What does it matter to them that the herons in all their various kinds, the osprey, the egret, the crane, the ibis, are scarcely seen now in the southern and middle States of America, and, when seen, are no longer together in confident colonies, as of yore, but nesting singly and in fear? 'Practically all

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our heronries are deserted. The birds have been slaughtered for their plumes,' writes a physician[1] dwelling in the Delaware valley. 'What were common birds in their season half a century ago are now rarely seen. The struggle for existence has been a violent one and the herons have been worsted. Scarcely a word of protest has been heard, and none that has been effectual.' Women of the world know this, or at least have been told it fifty times; but it makes no impression on them. They will wear osprey-aigrettes as long as any are left in commerce, and they think a humming-bird looks so pretty in their hair. What else matters?

That their example is copied by the women of the middle classes with swallows and warblers, and by the servant girl and factory girl with dyed sparrows and finches, makes no impression on them; if the fact be noticed to them they say that the common people always will be ridiculous, and stop their carriage in Bond Street to buy fire-screens made of owls, or an electric lamp hung in the beak of a stuffed flamingo.

Why should they care, indeed!—they who walk with the guns, even if they do not do more and secure a warm corner for their own shot; they who bring up their young sons to regard the cowardly and brutal sport of battue-shooting as the supreme pleasure and privilege of youth, and see unmoved their beautiful autumnal woods turned into slaughter-places?

One cannot but reflect how different might the world have been if women had been different in mind and temper; if, instead of their smiling, self-complacent

[1] Charles Conrad Abbott, M.D.

tittering approbation of brutality, they had shown scorn for and abhorrence of brutality. They clamour for electoral rights and leave all this vast field of influence unoccupied and untilled! They do little or nothing to soften the hearts or refine the feelings of the men who love them, or to bring up their children in any sympathy with animal life. Sport has become fashionable with them in the last twenty years, and the crack shot in the coverts of Chantilly this winter was a woman. Sporting clothes, breeches and gaiters, are now a recognised part of the fashionable woman's toilet.

I would not affirm (anomaly as it appears) that the pursuit of sport cannot co-exist with a love of animals, for I have known many sporting men and hunting men who were in a sense sincerely devoted to some animals. But sport inevitably creates deadness of feeling. No one could take pleasure in it who was sensitive to suffering; and therefore its pursuit by women is much more to be regretted than its pursuit by men, because women pursue much more violently and recklessly what they pursue at all; and it is impossible for the sportswoman logically and effectively to exercise any influence on her young children which could incline them to mercy —such an influence as Lamartine's mother had on him to the day of his death.

There are two periods in the life of a woman when she is almost omnipotent for good or ill. These are when men are in love with her; and, again, when her children are young enough to be left entirely to her and to those whom she selects to control them. How many women in ten thousand use this unlimited power which they

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then possess to breathe the quality of mercy into the souls of those who for the time are as wax in their hands? They will crowd into the Speaker's Box to applaud debates which concern them in no way. They will impertinently force their second-hand opinions on Jack and Jill in the village or in the City alleys. They will go on to platforms and sing comic songs, or repeat temperance platitudes, and think they are a great moral force in the improvement of the masses. This they will do, because it amuses them and makes them of importance. But alter their own lives, abandon their own favourite cruelties, risk the sneer of society, or lead their little children to the love of nature and the tenderness of pity; these they will never do. Mercy is not in them, nor humility, nor sympathy.

Can written words do anything to touch the hearts of those who read? I fear not.

On how many do written words, even dipped in the heart's blood and burning with the soul's fire, produce any lasting effect? Is not the most eloquent voice doomed to cry without echo in the wilderness? And what wilderness is there so barren as the desert of human indifference and of human egotism?

Pity is only awakened in those who are already pitiful. We cannot sow mustard seed on granite. The whole tendency of the age is towards cynicism, indifference, self-engrossment. The small children sneer much more often than they smile.

From Plutarch to Voltaire, from Celsus to Sir Arthur Helps, the finest and most earnest pleading against cruelty has been made by the finest and most logical minds. But the world has not listened; the

majority of men and women are neither just nor generous, neither fine nor logical. In a few generations more, there will probably be no room at all allowed for animals on the earth : no need of them, no toleration of them. An immense agony will have then ceased, but with it there will also have passed away the last smile of the world's youth. For in the future the human race will have no tenderness for those of its own kind who are feeble or aged, and will consign to lethal chambers all those who weary it, obstruct it, or importune it : since the quality of mercy will day by day be more derided, and less regarded, as one of the moral attributes of mankind.

XII

THE DECADENCE OF LATIN RACES

The Decadence of Latin Races

I HAVE read with the attention due to the author's name the essay of Professor Sergi on the decadence of the Latin nations. It seems to me, when reflecting on it, that the esteemed author gives to every slight change, the much-used, and much-abused, name of progress; and considers mere change as an indisputable betterment. He also considers that the Latin races cannot exist under modern conditions unless they form themselves on the models and follow the examples of non-Latin races; if, that is to say, they do not imitate what is foreign and alien to them. It is clear that he does not for a moment doubt that the non-Latin are infinitely superior to the Latin peoples, and he rebukes the latter for remaining immovable, although, somewhat oddly, he excepts France from his censure on account of her great commerce, and only includes in his ban his own country and Spain.

With Spain I do not occupy myself, as I am not sufficiently well acquainted with her to do so; indeed, Professor Sergi himself says very little about her; but of Italy I cannot consider that his condemnation is merited. If she do merit it, why does she do so?

Both questions are interesting. Professor Sergi, like too many writers of the present time, assumes as an indisputable fact that the mere innovation, the mere alteration of a thing, is of necessity improvement, advancement, amelioration; and this being his rooted conviction, he considers Great Britain and the United States the models and ideals of modern life. For this reason he would force Italy to abandon entirely her traditions, her instincts, and her natural genius, and substitute for them an exact and servile imitation of these two foreign peoples who have tastes in common with her. Unfortunately he does not inform us to what point he carries this desire, and if the immense changes he advises are to be dynastic and political, or merely social and intellectual. He prints in capital letters his chief advice to the Latin nations to *move on new lines;* but he does not explain whether he means to move to a new Constitution, to a new Representation, to a new theory and practice of Government; and he does not even say whether he thinks or does not think that the Church is the greatest enemy of national progress in Latin nations. It would be interesting to know in what proportions he holds the two antagonistic forces of Church and State to be guilty of opposing progress; that each is an obstacle to the higher forms of progress there can be no question in the mind of any dispassionate thinker. But he is careful not to commit himself to this view. Since he gives us so little information on this head, and limits himself to the counsel, somewhat meagre in its expression, to *move on new lines*, we may endeavour to find out for ourselves how far his advice goes: if

Italy do actually merit his contempt for her inertia, and if the non-Latin races deserve or do not deserve the admiration with which he pronounces on their superiority.

That the Italian nation is immovable is not true: for good or evil it moves as its great son Gallileo said of the earth. The fault, the peril, lie the other way. It is to be feared that the Italian people run the risk of losing their finest instincts, and their most gracious characteristics, through the exaggerated and obsequious imitation of foreign peoples, and by a too ready adoration of new things merely because they are new. They are the ideals of many a modern Italian. Guglielmo Ferrero has dedicated many hundreds of pages to the celebration of their perfections. I believe that such worship is chiefly founded on illusion, for it is as easy to cherish illusions about a steam mill as about a mediæval saint.

Let us look at the actual situation of Great Britain, setting aside her imperialist swagger, and regarding only facts. The English themselves admit that if a European naval coalition succeeded in preventing grain reaching their shores from America and the colonies, the nation in a fortnight would want bread. Is that an ideal or a safe position? If, in a sea-war, the British fleet would be successful is wholly uncertain, since no one can say how the metal battleships would behave in any distress; the manœuvres have not shed much light upon this question, and many of the marine monsters, as regards their utility in active warfare, are still unknown quantities. Equally uncertain is what would be the conduct of

the Indian population were Great Britain vanquished in any great war, for the majority of the peoples of Hindostan most unwillingly endure through coercion the yoke of the British rule.

In Ireland there is a racial hatred which nothing can extinguish, and only demands a favourable occasion to show itself. Canada may any day embroil England with the United States; and so may the West Indies, and the Nebraskan and Nicaraguan questions; and so may Newfoundland with France, and East or West Africa with Germany. In every part of the globe Great Britain has on her hands conquests, colonies, intrigues, enemies, open questions, and concealed questions, of every kind. Her greed is great, and her entanglements are innumerable. There are many weak points in her fortifications. To meet her obligations she is obliged to use legions of Asiatics, or Africans, or employ as mercenaries men from her distant colonies, or send the soldiers of one vanquished nation to help vanquish another. Thus did Imperial Rome, and so went to her undoing. Doubtless Great Britian is rich, powerful, strong, proud, and vain. So was Rome; so was Spain. It is possible, even probable, that at some, perhaps not distant day, Great Britain also will give way under the enormous weight of her self-sought responsibilities, and the still more ponderous weight of her many enemies.

Internally, also, England is not what she used to be. The old nobility is elbowed out of prominent place by a new aristocracy which has been created entirely on a money basis. Every ministry, when going out

of office, creates a new batch of titled rich men, lifted into the Lords in return for political or financial service. Wealth is now the dominant factor of English social life; and a commerce, wholly unscrupulous, is the sole scope of the tawdry and noisy empire of which Joseph Chamberlain is the standard-bearer.

What is there in all this to admire or to imitate?

Again we have seen that in the United States, since they abandoned their wise policy of non-intervention in external affairs, the national life resembles the English, is vain, boastful, hypocritical, cruel, and bellicose. The thirst of gain devours the nation. There is no other land in which the contrast between rich and poor is so sharp and terrible; none in which millions are thrown away with more frightful indifference and conceited display. Lynch law in all its horror reigns over many provinces, and unblushing corruption mounts into the highest places and poisons all the sources of national life. Guglielmo Ferrero stands stupefied before their innumerable newspaper offices, which he says use up every day as much paper as would go round the circumference of the earth! But he forgets, or ignores, that the literary quality of those journals is usually of the poorest and vulgarest kind, and that the chief part of their columns is filled by advertisements. He is also transfixed with rapture before the colossal houses which Americans call sky-scrapers, and sees the revelation of a stupendous genius in their passion for what is big, costly, eccentric; nor does he hesitate to compare it with the Florentine and Venetian genius!

Actually there was never on earth two more different

kinds of creation than these; never one more absolutely soulless, and one more nobly penetrated by the soul. The genius of the Italian masters was lofty, generous, at once humble and sublime, never interested, always consecrated to Art and Country; the skill of the American constructors has no other scope than that of getting money, of making the world stare, of producing the huge, the gross, the extravagant, the enormous, and labours for only one God, the venal Mercury of the market-place. In these new cities, so vehemently extolled, with their towering constructions which hide the smoke-obscured clouds, and their network of electric wires, of railways in the air, and trams running across each other, there is not the faintest spark of that divine light which is called Liberty. Americans boast of their freedom, but it only exists in words; it has no abiding place outside a boisterous rhetoric. The old Puritanism still exists in religious bigotry and persecution; office is bought and sold; justice is a matter of money; private life suffers from conventionalities and social tyrannies innumerable; political and municipal elections are the work of a Caucus. A man cannot drink, or stir, or do aught without his neighbour knowing and judging what he does; even marriage is to be made a matter for doctors to allow or disallow; the whole press is but a gigantic Paul Pry, a vast Holy Office where the persecution by the pen ends in the execution by the revolver.

Such is American liberty.

What can Italy learn from such a model?

Amongst the maladies of the brain known in this day is one which is called the mania of grandeur. It

seems to me that not only individuals, but entire nations, are possessed by it. It is perilous and contagious. Italy has already been inoculated by its virus.

There is also everywhere a fatal tendency to open the door of Italy to every foreign syndicate, and every foreign speculation, which puts forward a prospectus or launches shares on the market. The preponderance of Jews is enormous as owners of ground rents and estates in Italy; the chief part of Italian cities and towns is owned by Jews; and the greater number of the industries of all kinds in the country are in the hands of foreigners, like the newly-projected mining enterprise in Elba. If these mines be worth the working, why does not Italy work them herself, and take all the profits?

These facts are not due to any immovability; but to a dangerously lax tendency to run into foreign roads. The Italian Faust is only too susceptible to the invitations of the foreign Mephistopheles.

On the other hand a very marked inclination in the Italian is towards the modern forms of co-operation and communism. This tendency is not due in any way to the influence of the past, but to that mixture of jealousy and envy, of hatred of the rich, and detestation of labour, and of humble ways and of poor means, which is as general in Italy as it is everywhere else in our time, and which is the modern translation of the old classic clamour for Panem et Circenses. Is it towards this already popular communism that Professor Sergi would direct the Italian nation? The direction is already taken, and does not need his pro-

pulsion. If there be one thing more certain than another in the Italy of to-day it is the preference of a large proportion of the people for different forms of socialism and collectivism; and the persecution these doctrines receive lends them a dangerous force. At the same time as it persecutes them, the State, with strange self-stultification, recognises and grants one of the largest and most insolent of socialistic and communistic demands, *i.e.*, that for the expropriation of private land in the Agro Romano, and in the various latifundi in Sicily and elsewhere; and thus opens the door either to a most high-handed and unjust spoliation, or to an agrarian civil war in a not distant future.

Again, the most terrible disease of modern society—corruption—is not due to the past in Italy or anywhere else; it exists wherever men exist, and is as general in the republic of France or of the United States as under the autocracy of Russia or of Persia. The Italian disasters of Eritrea were due rather to corruption than to incapacity. When the mules were bought in Naples for 100 lire per head, and sold to the State at 500 lire per head, the battle of Abba-Garima, called by English people the battle of Adowa, was lost before it was fought.

Professor Sergi speaks of the defeat of Abba-Garima as a proof of the decay of the Italian race; but this is a very unfair deduction. As well might the continual defeats of the British in the first months of the present war in South Africa be held as a proof of British poltroonery. Any shortcomings which may have existed in the Italian army in Abyssinia, and exist at home, are, moreover, certainly not to be

traced to old-world influences; or to any emasculating tenderness for tradition. There is no reverence for the armies of the past in the actual Italian army, for it is unlike any of them; it does not resemble the armies of the Duchies, or of the Republics, or of the Florentine Carraccio, or of the Lombard trained bands, or of the levies of the Neapolitan Bourbons, or of the legions of Varus. The only model it resembles is that idol of its commanders, the German Army, on which it is shaped and governed, in all the cut-and-dried narrowness and hardness inseparable from the German system. All this may be considered to be inevitable now, but modern militarism is unsuited to the character of Italians, and reacts injuriously on the genius and temper, and physical and mental life, of the people.

Unhappily militarism is the most conspicuous and the most tenacious of all modern influences, and the failure of the Conference of the Hague so immediately followed by the war of aggression in South Africa, is a sad and irrefutable proof that the nations are not in the least likely to free themselves from its yoke.

Taking the modern temper in its civil systems, as in its military, it does not seem to me any better adapted to the Italian idiosyncrasies; and all its worst features already exist in all which is here called government. Italian legislation confounds perpetually regulations with laws; is fidgeting, irritating, inquisitorial, insolent, harassing; its tyranny spoils the lives of the populace; by means of its agents it penetrates into all the privacies of family life; its perpetual interference

between father and son, between master and man, between mother and child, between buyer and seller, between youth and free choice, between marriage and celibacy, between the man who takes a walk and the dog who goes with him, constitutes incessant causes of irritation, and is a perpetual menace which lowers over the popular life from sunrise to sunset, and scarcely even leaves in peace the hours of the night.[1]

More or less there is too much of this in all modern nations, but in Italy it is especially odious, being in such absolute antagonism to the courtesy and gaiety, and warm domestic affections, natural to the Italian public, and a source of continual fret and friction to it both in pleasure and in pain.[2]

There is certainly no necessity to incite Italians to admiration of foreign products and inventions. Such enthusiasm is only too general, and too blind, at least in that portion of the nation which is under the influence of the schools, the press, and the universities. An electrical machine has many more admirers than

[1] The other evening, in a theatre in Messina, a young gentleman expressed aloud his disapprobation of the performance; a person near bade him hold his tongue; the young man answered the rudeness with a blow; the person immediately produced a pair of handcuffs and clapped them on; he was a detective in plain clothes! The Italian of whatever rank he be can never be sure that he is not shadowed. The apprehension poisons existence to the most innocent.

[2] At Palermo in the April of this year it has been decreed by municipal edict that, as it is contrary to hygiene for the petticoats of women to sweep up the dust of the streets in which the spittal of the sufferers from tuberculosis may have fallen and dried in the sun, all women who walk in Palermo are to shorten their skirts! Health, it is austerely added, is more important than fashion!

the bell-tower of Giotto, and a shop-window of a Bon Marché than the Palace of the Doges. The modern temper, cynical, trivial, avaricious, vulgar, which now discolours human life as the *oidium* discolours the leaves of the vines, has affected too deeply the Italian mind, and has dried up its natural sense of, and capacity for, beauty. The glorious cities of Italy have been ruined by scandalous disembowelling; its ancient small towns are made ridiculous by electric light and steam tramways; the useful and picturesque dress of its peasantry is abandoned for the ugly and stupid clothes of modern fashion, cut out of the shoddy cloths furnished by English manufacturers; and this want of good sense, of good taste, of all true instincts towards form and colour, is a moral and mental malady due to that contagion of foreign influence which has poisoned Italy as it has poisoned Japan and India, Africa and Asia.

Therefore every counsel to her to follow modern impulses is pernicious. She is but too ready to do so, believing that, by this way, riches lie. Moreover, the advice to the Italians to rise, and change, and follow new paths, seems to me at the present time a cruel derision; because the Italian who gives it must be well aware that the nation is not free to do anything or make any change. It is not even allowed to speak. No public meeting can gather together without intervention of the police. The press cannot publish any opinions which are disapproved of by the Government without incurring sequestration of the journal, perhaps imprisonment of editor, writer, and printer. Where, then, can any fresh field be found in which to

plant any flowers of thought with any hope to see them root and blossom in action? The hand of the Public Prosecutor would pluck them up before they could stretch out a single fibre.

Take that question so dear to the country; the question of Italia Irredenta. Where could it be discussed in public without 'authority' intervening and silencing the speakers? Professor Sergi forgets, or avoids, to say that in Italy the first conditions of a 'movement on new lines' are wanting; civil liberty is wanting, and free speech and free acts are forbidden. Who can walk out into the country when barriers block up the end of every street? On the man, as on the dog, under pretence of public safety, the muzzle is fastened, and by its enforced use all health is destroyed.

The Italian of our time is too quickly intimidated, forgets too soon, wears the rosette in his buttonhole when he should put crape round his arm, dances with too ready an indifference on the grave of his hopes and of his friends. To form a virile character there is no education so good as the exercise of political and civil liberty; this education is but little given anywhere; it is not given at all between Monte Rosa and Mount Etna. The Italian is by nature too ready to be over-anxious and over-distressed at trifles; he thinks too much of trifling difficulties and the petty troubles of the hour; he is quickly discouraged, he is soon overwhelmed with despair, he has small faith in his own star, and he has not the elasticity and rebound of the Gaulois temper. Nothing therefore can possibly be worse for him than the kind of galling public tutelage and the perpetual molestation in which he is condemned to live; always

esteemed guilty, or likely to be guilty, however harmless he may be. It is illogical to condemn a nation for having no virility of character, when the systems under which it is reared, and forced to dwell, destroys its manhood, and forbid all independence of thought, speech, and action.

Let us take for instance that uninteresting person, a small tradesman, native and citizen of any Italian town; in all his smallest actions relative to his little shop, such, for instance, as altering or re-painting his signboard, he must obtain the permission of his Municipality. If he venture to clean or refurbish his board without authorisation, he will receive a summons and be compelled to pay a fine. The same kind of torment occurs in a dozen other daily trifles, magnified into crimes and visited with condign punishment; and, inevitably, the worried citizen becomes timid, nervous, and either afraid or incapable of judging or acting for himself. You cannot keep a man in the swaddling clothes of infancy and expect him to walk erect and well.

A shopkeeper, a tailor in Florence, known to me, cut the cord with which a municipal dog-catcher had throttled his dog; he did no more; he was immediately arrested, dragged off to prison, and kept there for months without trial: when tried he was condemned to four months of prison and a heavy fine.

Herbert Spencer has said, 'Govern me as little as you can'; *i.e.*, leave me to regulate my existence as I please, which is clearly the right of every man not a criminal. The Italian is, however, 'governed to death,' and tied up in the stifling network of an

infinity of small ordinances and wearisome prohibitions. In the sense, therefore, in which the sufferer from tuberculosis may be said to want health, the Italian may be accused of wanting spirit; but this is not the sense of the reproach of Professor Sergi. Professor Sergi, like so many others of his teachers and masters, desires to propel him along a road which has already cost him dear. How many millions has it not cost in the last score of years, that fatal weakness of Italians for imitating others? The rural communes of the country have more than a milliard of debts, almost all due to the senseless mania for demolition, for novelty, for superfluous alterations and imitations, works worse than useless, commended or proposed by the Government, and eagerly accepted by the communal and provincial councils, since each member of these hoped to rub his share of gilding off the gingerbread as it passed through his hands. All the vast sums thus expended are all taken out of the enormous local and imperial taxation, are divided between contractors, engineers, members of the town and county councils, lawyers, go-betweens, and all the innumerable middlemen who swarm in every community like mites in cheese, at the same time that the poor peasant is taxed at the gates for a half-dozen of eggs, or a bundle of grass, and the poor washerwoman carrying in her linen has her petticoats pulled up over her head by a searcher to ascertain if she have nothing saleable or taxable hidden on her person. These are new ways, no doubt; but they are ways on which walk the ghost of ruin and the skeleton of famine.

The Decadence of Latin Races

If it be true, as Professor Sergi considers, that Italy can never hope to extend her conquests and her commerce as northern and western nations will do, then it is surely all the more needful to hold her own place in the world by the culture and development of her own natural genius. A nation, like a person, should be always natural; to be fashioned on others is to be without any confidence in oneself, and lose one's equilibrium in the stress of every difficulty. The rigid and indigestible character of modern education is not adapted, I repeat, to the Italian temperament, which is *prime-sautier*, subtle but inflammatory, impressionable but unresisting, and loses enormously when it is shut down in the hot stove of the so-called 'highest studies.' Even the national manners, naturally so graceful and charming in all ranks of Italian society, lose their suavity, their ease, their elegance, under the influence of the foreigner and the vulgarity of modern habits. Good taste passes away with good manners; and pigeon-shooting, sleeping-cars, automobiles, bicycles and tramway crowds bring with them the breeding suitable to them; and the modern monuments, the modern squares, the modern houses, the whitewash daubed on old walls, the cast-iron bridges spanning classic waters, the straight, featureless, glaring, dusty streets, the electric trolleys cutting across ancient marbles, all conduce to make ignoble what was noble, and belittle all which was great.

All this is not the fault of a too reverent admiration for an incomparable Art, for a glorious history; it is a much worse thing; it is an oblivion of both history and art, ingrate, unworthy, and ruinous.

Many say that Italians are unfit for freedom; it is certain that they have never been tried by it. Whatever their government is called, freedom is unheard of under its rule. Year after year, century after century, all the Italian provinces, however differently governed, have been held down under an absolutism more or less disguised. The general character, with heroic exceptions, has been inevitably weakened. The man of easy temper and pleasure-loving disposition consoles himself with amusement; the serious man seeks refuge in study or in science; one and all accept inaction as their lot. A political *camorra* guides the chariot of the State, and the people draw aside, and stand silent, only hoping to escape being crushed under its wheels. Professor Sergi must be well aware of this sad truth; then why speak to Italy as if she were a free country, why speak to her of expansion and vitality when he sees her without power to purge herself of the fiscal and constitutional disease which is in her blood?

The Decadence of Latin Races

With as much reason might he chain up a greyhound, and bid him course the hare; clip the wings of a skylark, and bid it mount to the clouds.

XIII

ALMA VENIESIA

Alma Veniesia

'Our cities are fast losing their best characteristics,' said Pompeo Molmenti at Montecitorio, in one of those eloquent speeches which the Chamber hears often from him, and hears, alas! always in vain. His name is no doubt known to many English readers although his beautiful books are not as widely read outside the peninsula as they merit. His conspicuous position as President of the Venetian Academy has perhaps in a manner obscured, out of Italy, his infinite merits and vast erudition as a writer on history and art, and even Wyzewa reproaches him with making Venice too exclusively his universe. But surely Venice is wide enough, and great enough, to be the world of a man penetrated from his earliest years with her beauty, and with the grandeur of her past, and who, in his childhood, saw, accomplished by his seniors, that union of Venice to northern and central Italy, which raised such high hopes and caused such glorious dreams.

His works are, as I have said, but little known in England, not known at least as the classic scholarship, the historic learning and the artistic erudition of their

writer deserve; nor are the debates of the Italian Chamber truthfully enough represented in the English press for the brilliant oratory of the deputy for Salo to have found any echo in English ears. Many-sided as great Italians usually are, politics, literature, and history alike claim his allegiance, and art is his adored mistress. Eloquent, dauntless, and sarcastic, his periods pierce like arrows and lash like scourges, whether he condemns the miserable blasphemies of the modern spirit, or holds up to mockery such individual vanity as that of the Under-Secretary of State, who caused his own name and titles to be cut under a verse of Dante's on one of the stones of the church of S. Francesco at Assisi!

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I can imagine nothing more painful than for a man of fine taste and high culture, born and bred in such a city as Venice, venerating every shadow on its waters, the moss upon its walls, to be forced to see, day by day, roll up and break over it the mud-wave of modern barbarism. So may have watched, from the marble atrium of his villa, some Roman patrician of the days of Honorius the approach, upon the golden horizon, of the unlettered tribes drawing nearer and nearer as the sun descended, to burn, to slaughter, to deflour, to desecrate. 'Great and sublime attainment would be his who should save Venice from the dreadful menace now hanging over her!' cries Pompeo Molmenti, with the bitter consciousness that none will succeed in that endeavour, since her lot is now cast in times when her treasures of art are in the hands of tradesmen and speculators, to whom her past glory is naught.

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His years have been passed amongst her art and her disciples of art; he has watched the spoilers at their work amongst her treasures, and, with the grief of a son who beholds his mother dishonoured, he has been overwhelmed in these most recent times by the indignity and injustice of her lot.

She shares that lot with her sisters; the burden of her chains lies also on them; every city throughout the peninsula from Monte Rosa to Mount Etna has been insulted, dishonoured, defamed, defiled, even as she herself. But Venice is threatened with something still more than this; she is threatened with absolute extinction. There are schemes now simmering in the brains of speculators by which she will disappear as completely as one of her own fishing-boats, when it is sucked under the sea, canvas, and timbers, and crew, in a night of storm.

A few weeks ago, Molmenti gave the solitary vote against the destruction of more of the Calle, and the establishment of a night service of steamers on the Canalezzo. The record of that single unsupported vote is his own highest honour, and the shame of his contemporaries and co-citizens. But he wrestles in vain with the forces of cupidity and stupidity. Whether in the Council Chamber of Venice, or in the Parliament of Montecitorio, he strives in vain to resist the trampling hoofs of those devastating barbaric hordes which a pseudo civilisation vomits over his country.

What he justly calls the burial of the lagoons goes on every day; loads of clay and sand and stones being poured into that silent water which so lately mirrored

walls which were green with the hart's-tongue, penny- *Alma*
wort, and ivy-leaved toad's-flax, and reflected statues *Veniesia*
white through ages in the dustless air, shining acacia leaves, boughs of fig and laurel, carved niches, illumined shrines; the rubble and the rubbish are shot down into the canals which are chosen for extinction, and the walls are scraped, the acacias, the fig-trees, the laurels are cut down, the fruit-boat, the *sandalo*, the bridal gondola, are pushed out of the way by the brick-laden launches; where marble fretwork crossed the air, there is a cast-iron pontoon, and higher still a telephone wire; under foot there is a paved or macadamised way. Marco Polo could not find his house now; it still exists, but all around it is disfigured, dismantled, defaced.

The Palazzo Narni and the Ponte del Paradiso made, a few years ago, together one of the most beautiful corners in the world; go look at that spot now; it is enough to make the grey-beard of Cadore rise from his grave. There still remains on high, between the two houses, the admirable cuspide of the Trecento, on which there is sculptured the Madonna, who opens wide her mantle and her cloak to receive the kneeling people; but the beautiful bridge has been destroyed, and in its place has been built a frightful structure, with asphalte roadway and painted metal parapet. In similar manner the elegant, yet bold, arches of the three bridges at S. Nicolo di Tolentino exist nowhere, now, except upon the canvases of painters, and the three banks, near the Campo di Marte, which those graceful arches united, are now

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basely conjoined by three erections of stucco and cast-iron.

'In the *Arzere* of Santa Marta,' Molmenti writes in his latest work, 'once so green and gay and sunlit, a poor quarter no doubt, but one intensely interesting by customs and traditions, there blocks the way now, in all its stolid vulgarity, a cotton factory. Between the public gardens and the Lido, instead of the lovely verdure of the island of Sant' Elena, in its grace and its green twilight of drooped boughs, is a shapeless expanse of mud and cinders, which spreads farther every season, and threatens to invade the water-space which separates it from the gardens and S. Pietro di Castello. On this desert of coke and dirt there have been lately erected offices, sheds, warehouses, chimneys, engines, in the midst of which there still stands, hiding as though ashamed, the beautiful church of the Quattro Cento. But the invasion has been useless; the speculations have failed; and art and history mourn unavailingly the senseless and profitless destruction of this fairest gem of the lagoons: *insularum ocellus*. The ruin of Sant' Elena, of the view of San Giorgio, of the bridge of San Lio, the hideous new wing added to the noble brown marbles of the Pal Tiepolo, the hideous iron warehouse fronting and affronting the Ca d'Oro, the whitewash daubed on the Pal Sagredo, the indecent alterations and additions to that jewel of Pietro Lombardo the Pal Corner-Spinelli, the new red (like ruddle or red ochre) with which the Pal Foscari has been insulted, these are all offences which every traveller of taste, every

artist of culture, can see, and number, and denounce. *Alma*
But countless, and unknown to the world in general, *Veniesia*
and undreamed of by those who knew not Venice fifteen years ago, is the enormous loss to the city by the destruction at the hands of the Muncipal Councillors of the *Calli*, of the *Arzere*, of the mediæval bridges, as of those of which I have spoken above, of innumerable nooks and corners, historical and beautiful; old wells, old fountains, old shrines, beautiful fragments of sculpture and fresco, solemn convent walls, graceful church spires and monastic belfries, parapets, arches, doorways, spiral staircases winding up to hand-forged iron balconies, lamps of metal-work fine as lace-work, all these in innumerable numbers have been effaced, pulled down, built over, or sold; and, above all, there have been destroyed those lovely quiet green places, called each *il Campo* or *il Campiello* (the field or the little field), where, of old, the Venetians fed their sheep, stretches of grass enclosed by old houses, old convents, old towers, old quays, old bridges, with always a sculptured well in the centre of each, and the splash of oars near at hand.'

These have nearly all had a similar fate to that of the beautiful house in the Campo di S. Margherita, which Molmenti especially laments, of which the Venetian colouring, the carven galleries, the climbing vines, the bronze railing, the falling water with its spouting jets, have all disappeared, to give place to a yellow, plastered modern building, while its basso-relievo of the Virgin, so long dear to all artists, has been sold to a picture dealer.

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'One must be blind indeed,' writes Molmenti, 'not to see the horrible misgovernment of Venice in this latter half of the century, and persons still young can remember a Venice poetic, picturesque, filled with fascination and mysterious charm, now destroyed for no other reason than a senseless and brutal craze for novelty.'

What language can strongly enough denounce such wicked and insensate acts?

He quotes the well-known lines of Philippe de Commines as to the 'most triumphant city' that he had ever seen, 'the most beautiful street' (the Canal Grande) 'that there could be found in all the world'; and he adds, 'the stranger who comes now into this street only finds himself in a vast alley of shopkeepers.'

The Canalezzo is now, indeed, as he says, little more than a huge bazaar of tradesmen and dealers in curios, in which hundreds of advertisements, in many-coloured posters, announce the wares which are now for sale within the ancient palaces. The syndicate of foreign traders, now being established in Venice, will achieve its degradation.

Italian ministers and Italian municipalities are often accused of not encouraging warmly enough English, German, and American tradesmen and manufacturers to establish themselves in Italy, and of putting upon foreign commercial establishments in Italy a prohibitive taxation; the truth is that it would be much better were such foreign firms discouraged more effectively. It is urged on their behalf that they bring capital into the country; they may do so, but only to take it out

again for their own profit, and Italian labour sweats and groans only that some millionaire of Eaton Square or Fifth Avenue may increase his wealth, whilst at the same time Italian tradespeople, trading in their own right, on their own soil, are undersold by the shop-keeping and store-keeping Briton and Yankee. *Alma Veniesia*

I am far from entire agreement with Molmenti in many of his views (as for instance his admiration of English pre-Raphaelism), but I am wholly with him in his views of the claims of Venice, and of the sacrilege which is destroying her; wholly with him in his severe and scornful denunciation of what he rightly calls the *gretta e meschina arte dei nostre tempi* (the mean and trivial art of modern times), and of the modern density of perception and invulnerable self-conceit which render it impossible for the modern mind to appreciate harmony of hues and of proportions, and impossible for the modern architect to place a new building beside an ancient one without injury or vulgarity. Giotto could place his church at Padua on the remains of the Roman amphitheatre, with perfect unity, although in absolute contrast. When a modern mind has sufficient intuition to enable it to admire a work of other times, it can think of no better way of showing its admiration than to desire to pull down all the houses in its vicinity to lay it bare.

Molmenti says, with entire truth, 'It is a supreme duty for the few, who are capable of feeling them, to assert the sentiment of, and respect for, Art against the destructive and impious tendencies of the time.'

But, alas! it is labour of Sisyphus.

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There is now under consideration a scheme to make a tramway-road raised on piles from Mestre to Venice parallel with the line now followed across the lagoon by the railway. It is difficult to comprehend the motives and views of persons who desire to turn a beautiful water-city into a commonplace land one, or rather it is easy to perceive that the motive inspires the views, since nothing but the greed of concessionaires and of contractors could ever have evolved such a plan out of any human mind.

The concessionaire and the contractor are the modern representatives of ghouls and vampires of old-world romance. Truly, to them, as to the Sabreur of Offenbach, nothing is sacred. They are guided entirely by their lust of percentage, and to this they are ready to sacrifice every other consideration; indeed, no other consideration exists for them. They have settled on Italy for many years past as they are now settling on Abyssinia. Venice is essentially a water-city; dealt with as land cities are, under the present system, it will not only be disfigured and mutilated like them, but it will be swept away; it will cease to be. The world will have in its stead a dreary, dingy, trading port, with warehouses, factories, docks, grain elevators, electric works, all the polluted, crowded, discoloured, monotonous frightfulness which you can have now at any moment on any coastline of the United States of America. The Venice of Giambellini and the Veronese will be no more; you will have in its stead a petty maritime Pittsburg.

At the present moment Molmenti has successfully combated this Mestre project, but as the abominable

scheme of the night steamers on the Canalezzo, and the pontoon under S. Zeno, was almost unanimously *rejected* four times by the Venetian Council, yet, on its presentation a fifth time, was *accepted* (unacknowledged influences having been at work), it is impossible to all those who love Venice as she merits not to feel the greatest anxiety. For these speculators resemble the Röntgen rays, and find means to penetrate through closed doors and all other barriers. Iron still resists the Röntgen rays, and such iron the speculators find now and then opposed to them in the scorn of such men as the Count Antonio Donà della Rosa, who dismissed with offence and disdain the offer of two millions in gold for the purchase of the historic tapestries of his palace in Venice.

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Were there only fifty such men as Count Donà in every Italian province they would be able to hold in check the rage of destruction. But the character of Count Donà is very rare in these days anywhere, and grows rarer with every decade. The sordid Mephistopheles of a buyer usually finds as sordid a temper in the Faust of a seller whom he tempts. This may be a temper which enriches individuals; it is not one which ennobles or elevates a nation: and frequently not even individual wealth is realised for any length of time by the base barter, for the gambling on the Bourse, or at the club-house, often makes the ill-got gains vanish almost as soon as they are obtained. Such persons as find no attraction in either form of gambling, unhappily for the most part, shrink from action and from public life. Few have the courage of Molmenti, who throws himself

into the strife careless of what enmity he incurs, and rarely even buoyed up by any hope of success in his efforts, since to weave ropes of sand were scarcely more hopeless labour: it is impossible to succeed in any public work where there is no response to your appeal from the multitudes. And the voices of those who do secretly respond in feeling are dumb in Italy; people are afraid to speak; they are intimidated by the cry cast against them of want of energy, and of enmity to progress (progress, good heavens! a gin-shop instead of a temple!); they are afraid to be called reactionary, romantic, unpatriotic; and in municipal government, as in other government, everything is done by the wire-pullers, the money-grubbers, the speculators.

The timid public huddles together, mute, submissive, and afraid, shorn of its fleeces like a flock of sheep, but not daring to complain.

Those who do so dare are either ignored, or, if they give trouble, are repressed. The gondoliers of Venice have again and again risen against the ruin of their livelihood by the 'black devils' of the *vaporetti*, but force is at once called in and they are brutally silenced, flung into prison, and deprived of their licence, *i.e.*, of their daily bread. Because it is so picturesque a calling, and the balancing of the oar looks so easy a work, those who are outside it do not realise the hardships of a gondolier. In summer, if Venice be full, it is well enough, and brings a fair, though never a high, wage; but in the other seasons it is a life of great and continual exposure and fatigue. In cold weather, and Venice is intensely cold in the winter solstice, the long

vigils on the *traghetto* are most tedious and trying, *Alma* especially through the long chill nights. When the *Veniesia* icy winds blow in from the Alps or the Adriatic, the gondolier stands exposed to all their fury, whilst the passenger he carries sits warm and sheltered under the felze.

Strong and lithe in form, often handsome in feature, almost invariably intelligent and acquainted with legend and verse, invariably courteous and well-bred, the gondolier should have received the utmost attention from his rulers. It is painful to know that no body of men has ever been so slighted, so injured, and so wantonly outraged.

There is nowhere any more interesting and deserving community than the Venetian gondoliers, and few more worthy of regard; yet they have been dealt with as though they were no more than so much scum of the sea. Their long-established rights receive no consideration, and their injuries no compensation.

If the vote of Venice could have been honestly polled, no steam-boat would ever have been allowed on the Grand Canal, as, if the vote of Florence could have been honestly polled, the centre of Florence would be now standing untouched, and would have remained untouched for many a generation.

Meanwhile, it is said, by those competent to judge, that the great Murazzi, which protect Venice from the onslaught of the sea in winter storm, and which we all know so well as we pass out from the Lido by the Bar of Malamocco to Chioggia, are being dangerously undermined by the attacks of the high tides in rude weather, and require costly and im-

mediate repair. It is in vain that this most necessary work is urged upon the Government in Rome. The Government neither undertakes it itself, nor allows Venetians to undertake it. For any foolish, needless disfiguring work, such as the installation of the electric light in the ducal palace, against which Venetians in vain protested, the Government is always ready to waste millions. But for a work of obvious and vital necessity, such as that of the strengthening of the Murazzi, it has not a soldo to spare.

The architecture of Venice has the fragility as it has the fairness of the dianthus or the gemmia of the sea; its walls and buttresses and foundations are plunged into salted, sanded mud; its piles grow green and brown and purple with weed; its snowy marbles and its ruddy stones are mirrored in rippling or in stagnant water; they tremble under the vibrations caused by the accursed paddle-boats; they quiver, like living things, under the knife, as the engines roar and the cog-wheels turn. Assailed as the city is within by the invasion of steam and barbarism, it is entirely certain that she could not resist the force of the inrushing waters if the Murazzi were ever to yield to the pressure of a winter sea; and it is unhappily quite possible that the gigantic barrier of the sea-walls may give way on some day of unusually high tides and violent tempest, and the city herself will then be overwhelmed beneath the Adriatic waters.

Who would care if this were her fate?

The contractors, and concessionaires, and jerry-

builders, and bureaucratic thieves, and foreign speculators would have the pleasure and profit of building a spick and span new town, north-east of Mestre: all tiresome reminiscences of the Lion of St Mark would have sunk with the bronze horses underneath the waves. *Alma Venetia*

Many public men would breathe more freely were Venice but a memory of the past entombed in seaweed and in sand. For there is nothing so curiously malignant or so restlessly jealous as the enmity of a feeble Present of a great Past. It is such malignity, it is such jealousy, which, even more than greed of gain, and vitiated taste, caused, and causes, and will cause, the destruction of the great cities of Italy by Italian deputies, syndics, and municipalities, and by those foreign companies and alien speculations to which they unhappily open their gates.

If the fact did not face us at every step, it would seem incredible that, even in this age, such cities as Venice and Florence and Rome could have been sacrificed to the ignominious interests of wire-pullers. Each possessed, to protect it, unique beauty, splendour of association and tradition, an heroic past: and for each had the greatest of men laboured, in each had the charm of atmosphere and horizon lent a more than mortal loveliness to the architecture of man. And each is now wrecked, and ransacked, and despoiled, and obliterated, and destroyed as though a horde of savages had been let loose in their precincts.

There is no language strong enough to condemn the injuries from which they suffer.

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On the walls of the Flavian Amphitheatre there grew in marvellous fertility countless plants unknown elsewhere; survivors of sylvan worlds destroyed, of botanical kingdoms for ever perished, the seeds of which perchance had lodged in the sandals of the legions as they came from Palmyra or Babylon; this most precious legacy of nature was, as everyone knows, mercilessily destroyed in the first years of the Italian occupation of Rome.

The uprooting with knives and acids of the unique flora of the Colosseum was a type of the acts which, for the last fifteen years, have hacked away and corroded and destroyed off the face of the earth the supreme flowers of human genius.

In the present debasement and desecration of Italian cities there is not even such motive and excuse as that which was urged by archæologists for the ruin of these plants. There is everything lost, nothing whatever gained, in the debasement of classic and artistic cities to the level of Buluwayo or Klondyke.

To pull down the Palazzo Venezia and the Palazzo Torlonia, which it is decided to do in Rome, in order that the statue of Victor Emmanuel, for which the funds have not even yet been raised, may be visible from the Corso, is as contemptible as it is childish. The beauty of the Campidoglio is already ruined in order to place that statue there: might not that suffice? To throw down the Tower of the Amadei to put in its place a restaurant, or a drinking-shop, is so stupid an act that the enormity of the offence to history and art is almost forgotten in its imbecility. To cut off

a portion of the Archbishop's Palace to widen a road, *Alma* and destroy half the gardens of the Orti Oricellari *Venetia* to make a mean street, and to place the stations and rails of tramway companies on the macigno pavement under the Campanile, the Battistero, and the Duomo of Florence, are outrages to the whole educated world and the history of five centuries To destroy the Ponte del Paradiso in order to put a cast-iron pontoon in its place, is an abomination which should only seem possible to a company of clowns crazy with drink; whilst to turn the lovely isle of Sant' Elena into a heap of cinders for the pleasure of a carriage-building company, which company was not even guaranteed from bankruptcy, was unquestionably as unbusinesslike and as unprofitable as it was impious.

There is neither common sense, nor common decency, in the chief part of the measures taken within the last decade to humiliate and imbastardise the cities and towns of Italy. The process of destruction began indeed much earlier; but within the last ten years the pace has been increased from a leisurely walk to a furious gallop. The scramble to be first to outrage, to deface, to despoil, has become a St Vitus's dance amongst the syndics, assessors, and councilmen; each deliriously eager for the approving smile of the various ministers in whose hands the destinies of these great and unrivalled Urbes unfortunately are placed.

It must be remembered by the foreign reader that there is no Minister of Fine Arts in Italy. There is a Minister of Education, another of Public Works, and another of Agriculture, and between these three

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all questions of art and architecture are divided, and are decided in agreement with the various municipalities. The mischief the trio does is incalculable, for they are seldom selected with any regard to their æsthetic qualifications. Indeed, if ever anyone of them show any scholarly capacity and aptitude for his office, like that which was shown by Villari, his possession of power is very short. Of a recent minister of agriculture it is related that, as he looked over a valley planted with magnificent olives near Brescia, he exclaimed, 'What fine willows!'

A similar ignorance in matters belonging to their respective departments is expected of the Ministers of Education and Public Works. Were there a Minister of Fine Arts, he would undoubtedly be chosen from the attorneys, the manufacturers, the scientists, or the rural Bœotians.

Another minister of agriculture, Count Francesco Guicciardini, had an admirable and thorough command of the objects of his Dicastero; skilled in agriculture himself, and the owner of large estates, he knew what to do and how to do it; and by his energy an outbreak of phylloxera was arrested before any great losses had ensued. But outside agriculture, his influence was less excellent, because he was unfortunately enabled to meddle with matters not agricultural and beyond his knowledge; as when he ordered the destruction of a whole quarter of the martial and ancient city of Pistoia, and the waste of the town funds in the erection of a new savings bank. Over the choice of a design for this building, the townspeople of Pistoia are now violently quarrelling, whilst

many of their finest and noblest palaces are left to go empty to decay! *Alma Veniesia*

A minister of the strictest probity, of the strongest desire to do what is just and wise, is never long able to resist the pressure of those around him, the force of example, the persuasions of local magnates, and the insistence of the crowd of hungry perquisite-hunters. It is such shocking and wicked waste of money as was this in Pistoia which impoverishes every town, and disfigures each with vulgar piles of brick and iron, and grotesque monuments of black metal, whilst a miserable woman at their gates pays four centimes duty on a pint of milk before she can take it past the guards to sell, and a wretched man, who owns a little road-fed flock of goats, is taxed two hundred francs a year before he may drive them into the streets to yield the little nourishment which they can afford to invalids and children. Should the law now under consideration pass, and the debts of the Communes be paid by the State, and monies be henceforth lent lavishly by the State to the Communes, this expenditure will increase tenfold, and the jobbery accompanying it will be multiplied in similar measure.

No one of the governing classes is guiltless in the matter; cabinets, senators, deputies, prefects, mayors, town councils, provincial councils, each and all, sin alike in this matricide, and seem to vie with each other in suggesting and executing the abominable projects which disgrace the close of the century.

In this day, in everything appertaining to municipal government, the greater is sacrificed to the lesser; the

smug, the ordinary, the expedient, the venal are first of all considered; the kind of man who pushes to the front in affairs is bustling, sharp, keen, insensible, in whose own existence no necessity for anything except vulgar prosperity, as ugly as you will, is felt for an hour. To speak to such men of such impersonal desires as moved the makers of the great cities of old, is to speak in an unknown tongue, which they appraise as gibberish. They are, for the present time, the rulers of the world, and the material they are made of is the same clay, whether its shape take that of an emperor or a contractor, of a king or a beadle, of a minister or a vestryman. At the present hour the earth is given over to them.

Wyzewa accepts this insatiable mania for destruction as a characteristic, which of course it undoubtedly is, of the general disease of modernity; but he does not seem to trace it to what is surely its source, the greed of gain. All these engineers, builders, contractors, town councillors, bankers, usurers, speculators, chairmen, shareholders, and directors of companies, can make nothing out of the ancient glory and grace of beautiful cities; the mayors can get no savoury morsel to compensate them for all their servility and time-serving; the deputies can find no useful plunder to enrich the crew who have voted for them; in respecting the beauty of the past, syndicates and tradesmen and gamblers on 'Change would reap no harvest of gold whatever.

What else but greed has been the motive of that shameless desecration of Rome against which Geoffroy has raised his voice from the tomb to protest?

What else but greed the motive of that infamous destruction of the entire centre of Florence, its historic towers and churches and palaces, torn down with blind rage to be replaced by hideous hotels, and monster shops, and grotesque monuments? the most piteous, and the most inexcusable, injury ever done to the rights of history and of art. *Alma Veniesia*

What else the motive of that wanton disfigurement of Venice which has disgraced the last fifteen years of the municipal rule, and is about to continue the work of ruin merely to enrich the men of greed, the English and American tradesmen, the Hebrew speculators, the German hucksters, the cosmopolitan inflators of bubble companies?

The motive of all these destructions is always the same, and always of the lowest kind: gain. Everyone concerned in them gains, or hopes to gain. There is no other instinct or idea than this. It is, like the present diplomacy of Europe, an all-round game of grab; and a large percentage of the gains goes to the doctors who label the gambling 'Hygiene.'

The plea of health is a falsehood usually advanced in excuse of such destructions as those of the Florentine centre and the Venetian Calli and Campielli. Those who allege it know, as well as I do, that the unhealthiness lies not in the habitations but in the habits of the people. Water never touches their bodies; tight-lacing is a female rule in even the peasant class; the field-worker is as tightly cased in her leather stays as the duchess in her satin corset. The favourite foods of the populace are such as give worms, dysentery, and skin diseases; their drinks are

adulterated and poisonous;[1] their general habits are unwholesome and injurious beyond all description; they are saved only by the purity of the air which the municipalities, who chatter of hygiene, do their best to pollute with acid and chemical fumes, and the stench of noxious trades.

The men who prate of hygiene know these facts as well as I do; they know, I repeat, that the insalubrity is in the habits, not in the habitations; but the conventional lie passes muster and serves its end: it enables landlords to sell, and lawyers to pocket fees, and contractors to make profits, and all the troops of middlemen to fatten on the demolition of noble and ancient places and the creation of shoddy stucco architecture in their stead.

The sense of beauty has died with the public destruction of beauty: it is dead in the ruling classes; and what is far worse, dead in the populace; dead, or nearly so, in the writers, the painters, the sculptors. If in this latter class there were any strong, true, and delicate instinct of what is noble and beautiful, Molmenti would not stand alone in the Council of Venice; Prince Corsini would not alone have resisted the destruction of the Florence of the Renaissance; D'Annunzio would not alone repeat the denunciations of two dead foreigners, Geoffroy and Gregorovius, of the violation of ancient and of mediæval Rome. The voices of the artists (were

[1] Contadini drink the *vinaccia*, or *vinella*, made from the dregs of the wine-vats; but others drink (and often the contadino does so also) the chemical stuffs sold at drinking-houses and taverns with which the streets and roads are studded.

they artists in feeling indeed) would be, and would *Alma* have been, so powerful that no ministry and no *Veniesia* municipality would have ventured to ignore them.

But most modern artists are afraid to offend their public, their patrons, the town councils, the mayors, and communes, or the Ministers of Education or of Public Works, to which or to whom they look for employment; they have the decoration-hunger, which is one of the chief curses of Continental Europe, and decorations only come from the powers above; and in these powers above there is not the faintest glimmer of taste or feeling, there is only jealousy of a great and unapproachable Past.

Therefore, the few who do feel indignation do not speak; and the speculator, the jerry builder, the cunning lawyer and conveyancer, the vast body of greedy and gross spoilers, have their way unchecked.

In the case of Rome, of course, that cruellest and ugliest of all passions, religious antagonism, has had much to do with the atrocious ruin of the Prati del Castello, of the Trastevere generally, of the passage of the four trams in derision in face of St Peter's, of the hideous gimcrack houses built under the walls of the Lateran, of the destruction of street shrines and votive chapels and ancient chapels, of the erection of the entire quarters of what is called New Rome;[1] but religious hatred cannot be the cause of the barbarous scraping and daubing of classic buildings, of the degradation of the Via Nomentana, and of Porta Pia,

[1] It is now almost forgotten that the Ludovisi gardens ever existed as the motley fashion of the new Roman world flocks to the American Legation in the Pal. Piombino!

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of the ruin of such glory and grace as that of the Ludovisi and the Farnesina villas, of the bedaubing and beplastering, the dwarfing and disfiguring, the vulgarising and disfiguring of everything which is touched by the modern ædiles of Rome. No matter what the syndic be called, whether Ruspoli or Guiccioli, or Torlonia, or Colonna, no matter whether the cabinet be headed by Rudini or Giolitti, by Crispi or Pelloux, the pickaxe is never at rest, and the hammer and hatchet sound ceaselessly in street and garden, on desecrated altars, and in devastated groves.

To what end have served the fury and haste with which ancient ecclesiastical buildings have been razed to the ground in both the cities and the provinces? To none whatever, so far as any diminution of the funds and the numbers of ecclesiastical foundations can be counted.

The suppression of the monasteries and convents was actuated by love of gain as much as by polemical rancour, by the hunger of the newly-created kingdom, for their treasures and riches, for their rich endowments and saleable possessions. There was no sincerity about it; there could be none in a nation then almost entirely Catholic; and this insincerity is proved by the indifference with which the State allows the re-establishment of these buildings and these orders. At this moment the bare-footed Carmelites, a most bigoted order, have lately opened a new church and convent in Milan, which are endowed with three millions of money, and have been opened with great pomp by the Archbishop. Similar institutions are

being re-created in all directions, possessing all the evils of those which were suppressed, without their artistic beauty, and largely without their good faith and munificent charity. Rich and lovely maidens continue to take the veil when too young to have any realisation of what they do,[1] and the Church is as enriched as of old by their dowers; whilst the monk is not the less dangerous to intellectual liberty because, when he goes out of the gates for a few hours, he wears a coat and trousers like those of the layman of the adjacent town.

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The ancient monasteries and convents were at least an education to the eye: who could daily see the Certosa of Pavia, or of the Val d'Ema, and not be purified and instructed in visual memory and artistic instinct? The new revivals of the old orders teach nothing except a base and strictly modern union of superstition and compromise. Indeed, the State forces the priest to be base; it makes it the condition of allowing his existence. If he do not succumb to the State in all things (even in those most opposed to his conscience), he is deprived of his *placet;* and Zanardelli has in these last few days desired to deprive him of it without such legal forms as have hitherto been observed. For one of the greatest of the misfortunes of Italy is that, not in the Radicals nor in the Conservatives, nor in any one of the groups into which political life is divided, is there the slightest trace of any respect for individual freedom; liberty of action and of opinion

[1] A few months ago the Prime Minister, then the Marquis di Rudini, was present at the taking of the veil by a young relative in Naples.

obtain no fair play whatever from any one of the parties of the State.

True, it is not in Italy alone that the sense of symmetry and harmony is leaving the terrestial race; the want of beauty, as the daily bread of life, grows less and less felt every year by the modern mind wherever that mind has been unhinged by the manias of modernity. Beauty, natural and artistic, has become entirely indifferent to the majority of even highly-educated modern men and women. They have no leisure to contemplate it, no temperament capable of feeling it; it is in no sense necessary to them; it makes no impression either on their retina or their memory. Their lives pass before a revolving panorama, so rapidly dissolving and changing that they have no distinct impression of any of the scenes or subjects. Every year modern habits become more unlovely, and modern sensibilities more blunted. The preservation of what is beautiful, *per se*, at the present time is almost always ridiculed, unless it can be shown to be joined to some profit or utility. The characteristic passion of the hour is greed; greed of possession, desire of acquisition, and passion for ostentation. Trade has become an octopus embracing the whole world; the thirst for gain engrosses all classes; beauty, unless it be a means of gain, is to this temper a useless, or worse than a useless, thing: it is regarded as a stumbling-block and encumbrance.

It is doubtful if even the power of perceiving what is beautiful has not in a great measure left a large part of the population in all countries. Modern cities would not be what they are now

had not the race to a great extent grown colour-blind, and become without the sense of proportion. Modern builders and modern engineers would remain unoccupied were not the generations, which employ and enrich them, destitute of all artistic feelings. *Alma Veniesia*

Many of the prevailing fashions would be so intolerable to persons with any delicate or accurate perception, that such fashions could never have become general had any perception of this kind been general. Even the deformity of their bodies awakens no aversion in the modern public; if it did, the bicycle would never have been in demand.

Such blindness and deadness to the charm of beauty is to be noted in every nation, and is developed even in the extreme East whenever modern European and American usage influences the Oriental.

Japan is rapidly becoming the rival in vulgarity and hideousness of Chicago.

It is no doubt general and inevitable, the low tone of susceptibility, the dense, thick-skinned temper, which accompany what is called Civilisation, which are to be seen everywhere from cold to warm latitudes, wherever the steam-engine screams and the shoddy suits are worn.

The modern temper is something even worse than inartistic; it is brutally and aggressively hostile to beauty, whether natural or architectural. It will go out of the way to injure, to deface, to uproot, to level with the dust.

To the cold, bald, hard, derisive temper of the modern majority there is something offensive and

irritating in beauty, whether it be seen in the stately verdure of a tree in its summer glory, or of an ancient tower,[1] brown and grey in the light of evening. To fell the tree, to pull down the tower, is the first instinct of the modern mind, and it is an instinct clamorous, savage, insatiable, born of incapacity and triviality, of the hunger for destruction, and of a secret and ignoble jealousy.

There can, I think, be no doubt that modern education implants and increases this insensibility. If it did not, modern municipalities would not be what they are, would not do what they do. The only resistance to this insensibility is found, and this but rarely, at the two extremes of the social scale—the peasant and the noble, *i.e.*, in those who are least subjected to the pressure of general education. In the man, absolutely uneducated, and in the man reared by an individual and highly-cultured education, are alone now to be found any appreciation of beauty, natural or artistic.

A French writer, with no pity for the lovers of teas and porcelains, has said recently that he looks forward with joy to the time when the whole empire of China will be covered with factories and mines as thickly as blades of grass grow in a meadow. Most modern persons have no higher ideal than his. In similar phrase, Ferrero, whose political writings I have often cited with approval, and whose striking abilities I greatly admire, but with whose narrow socialist temper I have no sympathy, actually states that the

[1] The other day I saw from a railway train a grand old Longobardo tower which had been coloured a bright pink!

plain of Lombardy was created by nature to be studded with factory chimneys! *Alma Veniesia*

Even into remote mountain towns, and in small forgotten cities, on the edge of lonely lakes, or deep-sunk in chestnut woods, or ilex-forests, the same desecration creeps, and sullies, and pollutes. Gim-crack, gaudy villas, and pasteboard houses, show their pert and paltry forms amidst noble palaces, or beside patrician towers. Pistachio green paint makes day hideous everywhere, daubed on deal shutters and blinds, accompanied by the paltry stained doors, and the stucco mouldings, of the epoch. The modern municipality displays its whitewashed and belettered frontage, unashamed, on some grand old piazza, which has seen centuries of strife and splendour. Silent sunlit bays of Tyrrhene or Adriatic, lovely as a poem of Shelley, are made vulgar and ludicrous by lines of habitations such as the jerry-builder of the end of the nineteenth century procreates, wearing an air of smug imbecility which makes one long to slap their stucco faces; of course the drinking-shop, the cycling-casino, and the shooters' club have been run up beside them so that their patrons and frequenters may befoul the roseate evening, and insult the ethereal night.

Moreover, it is strange to note how, with the vulgarisation of the towns and of the landscapes in this classic land, the human physiognomy loses its classic unity and grace, grows heavier, coarser, meaner, commoner, changes indeed entirely its type and colouring; the camus or the snub nose replaces the aquiline, the scrofulous mouth replaces the lips

shaped like a Cupid's bow; the eyes diminish in size and grow lack-lustre; the beautiful oval outline of cheek and chin alters to the bull-dog jaw and puffy cheeks; the clear and pure skin alters to the sodden, pallid, unwholesome complexion of the new type. This is no exaggerated statement; anyone can see the change for himself who will take the trouble to observe such young Italians as throng the second-rate and the third-rate *cafès* and dining-saloons of cities, and then go into the more remote country, and see the Italiote race still in its integrity, in old-world hamlets of the Abruzzi or the Apennines, in forest-sheltered nooks of the Sabine or the Carrara mountains, in sea-faring, wind-swept villages of the Veneto, in nomad sheep-folds on the oak-studded grass plains of the Basilicata, or in old walled towns, calm and venerable, in the lap of the high hills, where the shriek of the engine has not yet been heard; where it is still unknown, that which Loti calls in his latest work, 'cette chose de laid, de noirâtre, de tapageur, d'idiotement empressée, qui passe vite vite, ébranle la terre, trouble ce calme délicieux par des sifflets et des bruits de ferailles, le chemin de fer, le chemin de fer!—plus nivelant que le temps, propageant la basse camelote de l'industrie, déversant chaque jour de la banalité et des imbéciles.'

In the provinces he will still find, in thousands of living creatures, the youths of Luca Signorelli, the knights of Giorgione and Carpaccio, the young gods of Paolo Veronese, the noble grey-beards of Tiziano, the stately women of Michelangiolo, the enchanting children of Raffaelle, and Correggio. But in the

towns, and in the country where it receives the moral and physical miasma of the towns, he will find little else but the debased modern type, with its snigger of conceit, its cynical grin, its criminal's jaw, its cutaneous eruptions, its dull and insolent eyes, its stunted growth, and its breath foul with nicotine and chemical drinks, such as the modern schools, and the modern scientists, and the modern dram-shops have made it. *Alma Veniesia*

Commerce, from being beneficent, is fast becoming a curse. It usurps and absorbs all place and all energy. Its objects are allowed to push out of existence all higher aims; armies and navies exist only to protect it; and an English Premier was not ashamed at a Lord Mayor's banquet to declare that this was their unique aim: to conquer fresh fields for trading, and protect the trader in his invasion of the rights of others. His Secretary of State for the Colonies and his Chancellor of the Exchequer have, still more recently, repeated after him this singularly ignoble view of a nation's duty, and of a soldier's and sailor's obligation.

The Secretary of the Colonies, indeed, rising to unwonted enthusiasm, added that all the greatness of Great Britain lies in its commerce. No doubt this may be a fact; but it is not an ennobling fact; and it is one which is the parent of gross sins, and the enemy of high ideals; in the name of commerce, murder, theft, and torture are all legalised, and the most brutal egotism deified; it can be at best only a material greatness which is thus consolidated.

To measure the virtue of a nation by its com-

merce alone is like measuring the virtue of a man solely by the amount of his income. This manner of estimation is one common in the world, but it can never be considered a high standard. However, this excuse of the prior and dominant claims of commerce which may be put forward in the case of Great Britain for the sacrifice to it of all other interests cannot be alleged by Italy except in some districts of the north. What requires protection in five-sixths of Italy, and only suffers extinction through fiscal pressure, is small commerce: personal arts, crafts, and trades, which flourished so happily in past times, and would still live in fair peace and comfort were they not stoned out of existence by a merciless taxation, direct and indirect. These neither disfigure nor offend the beautiful and venerable little towns in which they dwell; the smith has his anvil under a Lombard arch, the apothecary keeps his ointments and simples in old majolica vases, the barber's pole slants under a shrine of the Renascence, the cloth-seller piles his bales against the sculpture of a Seicento wall, the seedsman's sacks show the shining berries in their gaping mouths behind the iron scroll-work of mediæval kneeling-windows. It is not they who have hurt their birthplaces. It is the English syndicate, the Jew syndicate, the German money-changer, the American tram-contractor, the foreign electric company, the foreign co-operative store-keeper, who have no end but their own gain, and who tempt to shameful acts those native to the soil, in whose hands lie the fate of these historic, and late happy, places.

Ferrero has, concerning this, a true and touching passage which is much worthier of him than his views regarding Lombardy and the factories. He says, in a recent able article on the 'Miseria e Richezza in Italia':—

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'The tendencies of new commercial life, in its immense enterprises, is to send money and movement into a very few amongst the cities of Italy, the others live content with their small traffic and trade; though trembling when the fleet well-springs of their small fortunes are menaced or run dry. Many of these towns were in other days rich, and still preserve the evidences of their splendid past in sumptuous palaces, spacious squares, monumental churches; a sense of venerable years, of profound repose lie on them; yet a sad and cruel tragedy often passes between these walls; beneath the magnificent palaces of the Renascence and the beautiful mediæval Lombard churches, the populace perishes slowly of hunger. The small ancient industries disappear, crushed out by the victorious rivalry of the great tradesmen of the north. The ruin of these small industries and of these individual crafts began some decades ago; but it was much less cruelly felt then than it is now, and the sole recourse or solace now left to it is in revolt. A revolt to which the Government only replies by fixed bayonets, and a duty on corn, which is a crime.'

Ferrero, as a political economist is bound to do, considers that no means should be taken to artificially

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sustain ancient methods of work and trade, but he says with entire truth that to artificially depress and deplete them is on the part of the State an abominable act. To wear out the temper and patience of the populace with harassing edicts; to drive to desperation those who are cheerful and contented in an honestly supported poverty; to starve them by artificially raised food-prices, and by gate-taxes, which ruin the small trader, the modest householder, and the rural vendor alike; to render it, by a monstrous taxation, impossible for small industries to exist; to levy income-tax (*focatico*) on the poorest labourer—this is the terrible error, the inexcusable cruelty, of which the actual, and every preceding, Italian Cabinet is, and has been, guilty. If there be revolution in the air, who can wonder? The granaries are guarded by battalions, whilst millions are thrown away on bad statues to Savoy princes. These are facts which it is not necessary for a man to know his A B C to read. But they are the primer which is daily placed before the eyes of the many various peoples of Italy from the Col de Tenda to Cape Sorano; and these peoples are of rare intelligence even where wholly illiterate: often, indeed, most intelligent where most illiterate.

There were, not many years ago, a great measure of mirth and contentment in all the minor cities of Italy, and in the small towns and the big walled villages; much harmless merry-making and pastime, much simple and neighbourly pleasure, much enjoyment of that 'ben' di Dio,' the blessed air and

sunshine. Most of it has been killed now; starved out, strangled by regulations and penalties and imposts, and a fiendish fiscal tyranny; dead like the poor slaughtered forgotten conscripts in Africa. *Alma Veniesia*

But this opens out a political question, and it is not of politics that these pages treat, but of art and its outrage: above all, of such outrage in Venice; since the President of her Academy did me, of late, the honour to say to me, 'Non può Lei far nulla per salvare la nostra povera Venezia?' Alas! how powerless are all our forces against the ever-rising tide of modern barbarism!

A precious intaglio of exquisite workmanship is being broken up and pulverised under our eyes; and no one cares.

I know a wide plain, intersected by many streams, and lying full in the light of the west; these streams are filled from August to October with millions of white water-lilies.

Nothing more beautiful can be beheld than these countless water-courses covered with these cups of snow, which share the clear, slowly-rippling streams only with the water-wagtail and the sedge-warbler the bullrush, and the flag. They resemble exactly the river on which the Virgine delle Rocche drift with their brothers and Claudio. But the peasants push their black, flat-bottomed boats recklessly amongst the silver goblets of the flowers, crashing into them and breaking them with brutal indifference, and raking them into heaps in their boats, to be cast up on to the oozing banks to rot and serve as land manure; the boorish insensibility of the boatmen

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is typical of their time; the lilies would serve quite as well for manure were they allowed to live out their lovely life, and were not gathered until they were yellow and faded; but they who rake them in do not wait for their natural season of decay; they smash and break them in full flower as they kill birds on the nest in the fields and hedges.

Their fate is like the fate of that greater lily, rosy-red at sunset, which lies cradled on the waters between Mestre and Murano; and which is roughly and painfully being uprooted and destroyed that a pack of foreign traders and native attorneys may wax fat and lay up gold.

No doubt the fate of Venice is common in these days; no doubt, all over the world, capitalists and socialists join hands across the gulf of their differences to unite in the destruction of all that is beautiful, graceful, harmonious, and venerable.

But in Italy such destruction is more sad and shameful than anywhere else in Europe, by reason of the magnificence and glory of her past, and in view of the pitiful fact that the land, which was a Pharos of light and leading to the earth, is now every year and every day receding farther and farther into darkness: that dreadful darkness of the modern world which comes of polluted waters and polluted air, of the breath of poisoned lungs, and the pressure of starving crowds. The basest form of venality, the lowest form of greed, have fastened on her with the tentacles of the devil-fish; and are every hour devouring her.

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